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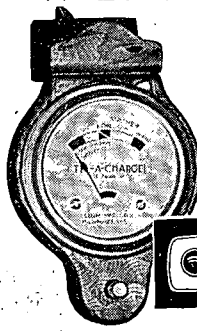
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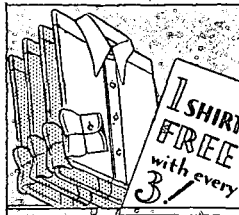
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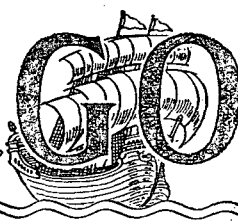
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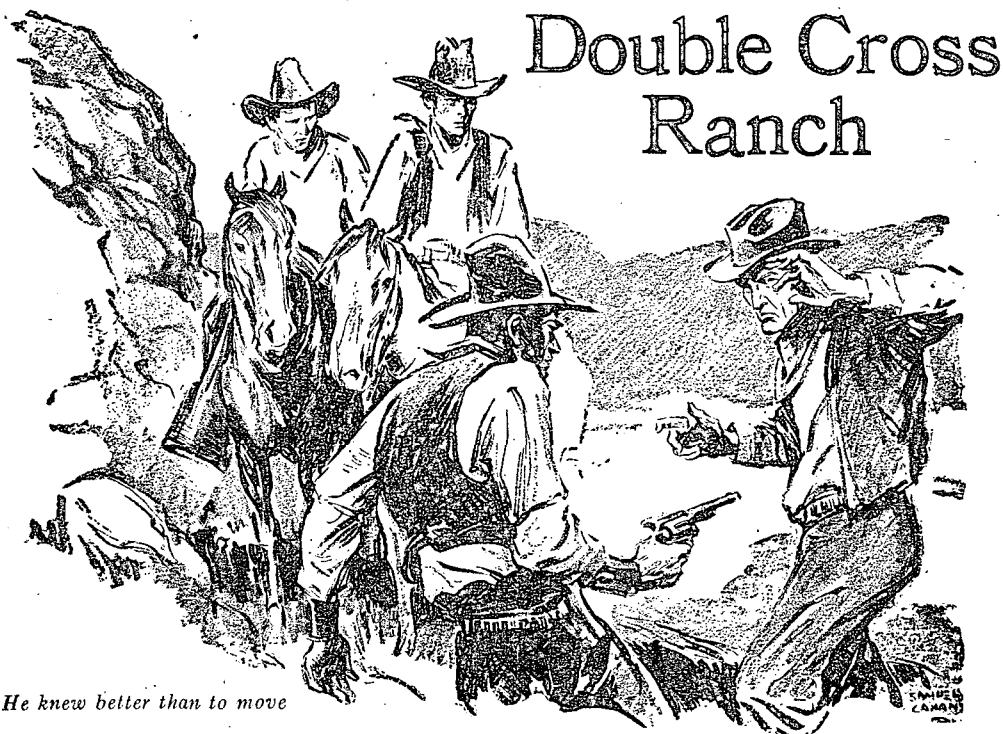
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ARGOSY

VOLUME 223

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 1931

NUMBER 4



It looked so simple—too simple—for Wetherell to run that drove of yearlings into the hills; nor did he realize what a strange series of traps he was springing by that one act

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Man-Hunt," "Gone North," etc.

CHAPTER I.

EASY STEALING.

WETHERELL drew his pony to a halt within two or three hundred feet of the drove of yearlings. He had seen them from a

distance while riding westward and had observed that they were separated from the main herd of cattle by at least two miles of closely cropped bunch grass. The main herd was working westward and was now straight out from a promontory that jutted into the

valley. The promontory was south. Northward, forming the rim of the valley in that direction, was a line of ragged buttes surmounting a small stream of water known as Deer Creek. The buttes and the promontory southward formed a narrow neck which connected two sections of the valley. Both sections expanded widely from the narrows like an hourglass, and extended to the east and west horizons.

The morning light was clear and the sun behind Wetherell disclosed the westward section of the valley to his view. He was positive that except for the herd of cattle there was no living thing in the valley. At least no moving object besides the cattle was disclosed to his keen, searching gaze. It was apparent to him that the Cross-in-a-Box outfit must be working far down the basin where the range swept northward mile upon mile between distant hills and mountains.

The big valley was silent and slumberous. There was no breeze, no motion in the valley or in the sky above it. The sun was not more than two or three hours high and Wetherell knew that if by chance any members of the Cross-in-a-Box outfit, or Teasdale himself, the manager, should be gazing eastward toward him, their vision would be shortened by the sun's rays striking their eyes.

Wetherell was unaccountably pleased over the situation. He had not been able to explain the impulse that twice before had led him to do what he now contemplated doing again. He meant to steal a drove of yearlings.

The strange urge to appropriate property belonging to others was not inexplicable, for he had encountered it before. In him the acquisitive instinct was strongly developed, and in whatever gainful project he partici-

pated his only conscious concern was in being apprehended in the act. So far in his life he had fortunately escaped detection.

He had been riding westward and now, casually and calmly, he wheeled his pony eastward and rode to within a score of yards of the drove of yearlings. Half a dozen of the animals raised their heads and looked at him. They were white Herefords. Their short horns had not yet appeared. They were sleek, smooth, well grazed, valuable, potential beef stock. It was early April now, and given good range and plenty of water by September or October they might develop into good beeves.

They started at sight of him, looked at him as though wondering what his intentions were, and then, as he continued to ride slowly toward them, they began to move slowly eastward down the valley.

Wetherell did not hurry them, he merely kept them moving by the simple process of following them. Two or three fractious yearlings, resenting his presence, sought to break from the main body, but were instantly turned back by the snapping of Wetherell's quirt, flecked menacingly at the point of break. And presently, seeming to have comprehended Wetherell's intentions, the entire drove moved eastward at a shuffling trot. And now having them in motion Wetherell turned in the saddle and again scrutinized the level valley and the desolate hills behind him.

There was still no movement anywhere in the vast reaches of distance. The great herd of cattle contentedly grazing at a distance of perhaps two miles had apparently not noticed Wetherell's activities. It seemed that for the third time Wetherell was to

succeed in appropriating a bunch of Cross-in-a-Box yearlings.

ALTHOUGH it was apparent that he was not being watched, Wetherell was cautious. Having started the yearlings, he headed them slightly south by east until they were moving along the edge of the valley close to some timber that would screen them behind the promontory on the south side of the narrows. And now Wetherell forced them into a slow run, for a drive of several miles confronted him before he could get the yearlings into a pass through the mountains that would bring them safely to his own range.

The sun climbed higher and the aspect of the valley changed. There was a swimming brilliance in the sky now, the sun had grown white hot.

Wetherell got the yearlings through a maze of small hills at the base of the mountains and drove them up a dry wash to a bench. He hazed them along the bench for a half mile, permitting them to lag a little here, for they would not be distinguishable against the craggy rock walls that rose above and behind them.

He swung them to the right, around a shoulder of the mountain to a broad level whose eastern end emerged into a slope that led downward to the broad reaches of his own range.

He was safe now. Teasdale's men were not likely to suspect that the yearlings had gone through the mountain pass. As a matter of fact, the entrance to the pass was not over twenty feet in width and across it Wetherell had placed a barricade of cedar rails which he had removed before riding down into the Cross-in-a-Box range, and which he replaced after driving the yearlings through.

Wetherell now rested his arms on the saddle and stood for a long time with the horse in front of him, gazing down into the valley that he had just left. He could detect no change in the scene he had witnessed, except that the drove of yearlings had vanished.

Wetherell was a tall man, and slender. He was fifty. His face was thin, his nose long, his mouth big, with straight lips. His chin was prominent and had an aggressive thrust. The sweep of his jaws was also aggressive, and they had the appearance of being continually clamped, as if with determination. His eyes were deep set and were of a hard, pale blue with a squint and a brilliance that seemed to express contempt and defiance.

He wore a black felt hat of the ordinary wide-brimmed variety, which was pulled well down over his eyes to shade them against the intense brightness, and his virile, iron gray hair was cut short where it showed at his ears and at the back of his head. He wore a woolen shirt and vest, corduroy pants, the bottoms stuck into the soft tops of well-made boots which were equipped with spurs. Around his waist was a belt studded with cartridges, in which there was a holster that revealed the butt of a heavy revolver.

He was pleased with himself in this new rôle. Amused. Stealing cattle was quite as easy as stealing other things. Folks with property should be careful to throw safeguards around it. As a matter of fact very few people deserved to own property—either cattle or money. The most of them who handled property made of it a temptation and a provocation to men of acquisitive habits.

This latest theft stirred Wetherell to a bit of reminiscence. His pale blue eyes were glittering with the thoughts

of past triumphs in the art. How easy—how damned easy!

CHAPTER II.

A TIGHT FIX.

IT had grown hot on the level at the head of the pass. The sun was beating down with terrific intensity. Glittering, dancing heat waves were shimmering along the floor of the mighty basin westward. Through some magic of the sun, distant mountains had grown remote, receding from view until they were now only a dim tracery of *papier-mâché* shapes in front of which dust and sun had thrown a vari-colored gauze veil of delicate texture.

Stealing had always been easy for Wetherell. Select one year of his past, off-hand, and he could now remember details of deals through which somebody's money had trickled into his own pockets, and usually the victim was ignorant of how the transfer had been made.

Big and little transactions. Of course the big ones were most vivid in his mind. Particularly one. The Addison estate. In an Eastern town that need not be named. As executor he had had golden opportunities, and he had taken full advantage of them. It had not been an involved or mysterious system. He had merely sold good stock and had then purchased worthless stock from himself through a third person, a confederate.

In the end he had transferred to himself almost all of the money belonging to the Addison estate. And he had not made the mistake of banking his gains in his own town. They had gone into a bank in a distant town, even to another State, deposited to the ac-

count of John Wetherell. He had almost forgotten those other days, and he did not have a single regret.

Wetherell had ceased thinking of the past, and his thoughts were now engaged in contemplation of the awful majesty of Arizona's desolation. More than once in the two years that he had lived in this country his imagination had been captured by these grimly beautiful vistas of a rugged world which, even when he had been engaged in his task of appropriating property in the East, he had visualized.

He stood amusing himself with his mental pictures, aware that the silence around him had grown sepulchral. So engrossed was he that when suddenly a sound assailed his ears he started like a man suddenly awakening from slumber, to realize that his senses had not comprehended the significance of the noise that had startled him.

The sound came again, suddenly, sharply, and he turned to see three horsemen coming swiftly toward him around the shoulder of the mountain. They were two or three hundred yards distant and were riding abreast. He knew there was a trail there—leading south and west down into a system of hills and ridges along the valley, and even before he saw the faces of the riders he recognized them. They were Teasdale, the Cross-in-a-Box manager; Banater, the foreman, and Judd, the straw boss.

Was their appearance here accidental or had they witnessed the theft of the cattle? If they had witnessed the theft they must have been watching from a distance, and he doubted that they would be able to identify him as the rustler.

He was unperturbed, calm, and he greeted them with a wave of the hand as they rode close to him, halted their

horses and sat looking at him with inscrutable eyes.

THEY said nothing, they merely sat on their horses and looked at Wetherell. That circumstance in itself was suspicious. But Teasdale's gaze was not steady. It was shifting, intent, probing. Wetherell knew that Teasdale had instantly seen the yearlings that were bunched at the foot of the pass. He was certain that Teasdale had inspected the barricade. He saw that Teasdale, with a lightning glance, had observed the hoof tracks in the hard sand coming up the wash to the level and heading straight toward the barricade.

Wetherell had never liked Teasdale. Something about the man annoyed Wetherell. Teasdale was one of the few men that Wetherell had met whom he could not appraise at a glance. Teasdale's eyes were serene and steady whenever they gazed into Wetherell's.

This steadiness always made Wetherell feel as if Teasdale was looking straight through him, was aware of his character, of his mental processes, but did not permit his knowledge to find expression. Yet Wetherell had been able to see various lights and shades of thought in Teasdale's eyes which convinced him that Teasdale was concealing contempt and amusement.

And now, apparently having finished his inspection of the level, the pass, and the wash, he looked straight at Wetherell, and Wetherell saw that his eyes were swimming with the old provoking serenity.

Teasdale had slipped one foot out of the saddle and was sitting crossways with an appearance of negligence and unconcern. And now Wetherell was aware that a change had come into the

atmosphere, and he was equally aware that the coming of the three Cross-in-a-Box men had brought about the change. Behind the serenity in Teasdale's eyes, Wetherell perceived something else—cold, grim amusement.

"Just sightin' around, Wetherell?" he asked.

"Just sightin'," replied Wetherell.

"Sightin' anything particular?"

"Nothin' special."

"Seems you was gettin' an eyeful when we first saw you," suggested Teasdale.

"Thinkin'," said Wetherell.

"Hm, just thinkin', eh? Not doin' any sightin' to speak of then, eh? See anything of a drove of yearlings?"

"Sure," answered Wetherell. "You seen 'em too, they're right down there at the foot of the pass."

"Oh, shucks, so they are! Got any idea how they got down there, Wetherell?"

Wetherell was aware of the note of cold mockery in Teasdale's voice.

"Why, no; that's what I was thinkin' about."

Banater and Judd smiled broadly. They said nothing; seemingly they were content to permit Teasdale to do the talking. Yet Wetherell observed one peculiar and ominous circumstance, which was that both men had their holster flaps open, that the butts of their heavy six-shooters were exposed, and that both had turned their horses slightly sideways to him.

"Seems them yearlings will be mighty good jumpers, give them time," suggested Teasdale.

Wetherell was aware that the situation looked difficult. He sought to avoid the stern finger of suspicion by simulating indignation.

"What do you mean, Teasdale? You mean to insinuate that I took the

bars down so they could get through there?"

"Well, no," said Teasdale, "I reckon they jumped through all right. Their tracks aren't an hour old, and for about that time we've been gettin' glimpses of you as we came along the south trail, noticin' that you were standin' here gettin' an eyeful of the basin. Of course them yearlings went right by you without you noticin' them, and seein' as you were standin' right in the center of the pass it must be that they separated and went around you both ways to keep from runnin' into you... Maybe I could believe that if it wasn't for the tracks of your boots showin' in the sand where you took down the bars and put them up again. Wetherell, you been gettin' an eyeful of the country and while you were doing it you got a drove of my yearlings." His right hand moved swiftly downward and came up with his six-shooter.

"Don't move!" he snapped. "Get his gun, boys."

WETHERELL stiffened. He knew better than to move, however, and he stood rigid while his gun was jerked from its holster and investigating hands were run over his clothing in search of other weapons.

And now had been demonstrated the fact that stealing in this country was not as simple a matter as Wetherell had previously decided. At a stroke there had come to Wetherell's senses the grim conviction that a tragedy was imminent in which he was to play the leading rôle.

No words were necessary to tell him this. He had only to look into the eyes of the three men to know what impended. Teasdale's were hard, his lips straight and expressionless. The faces

of the two other riders were long and solemn.

Teasdale's gaze again seemed to take in the wash, the little level, the pass, the barricade, the west basin. Then it went back to Wetherell.

"Get on your horse!" he ordered.

Wetherell looked up. His blue eyes were furtive. A gleam of startled incredulity was in them.

His face whitened, his mouth opened.

"Teasdale," he said, "you can't run this in on me. I ain't gettin' on my horse at your orders. I don't have to have you to tell me what to do. You come bustin' up here, and find a bunch of your yearlings that have got off their range, and you're hintin' that I stole them. You're a damned liar! I don't know any more about them yearlings than you do, and I ain't goin' to be accused of stealin' them. They was here when I got here. I was just standin' here wonderin' about them, just as I told you."

"Sure," mocked Teasdale. "You was here, dreamin', and them yearlings flocked around you, and past you. Not bein' able to take down the barricade, why they just jumped over it. And you didn't hear 'em nor see 'em. You was just wonderin' how they got there. Well, you won't be wonderin' about 'em where you're goin', Wetherell," he concluded.

Wetherell's eyes dilated. What he saw in the eyes of the three men convinced him of the deadly seriousness of their intentions. He stood, crouching a little, rage and fear in his gaze. He knew that if he rode westward over the south trail with these men that somewhere in the forest they would halt beneath a tree. He had no difficulty in visualizing the scene—the three Cross-in-a-Box men riding swiftly away, himself remaining, his body

swinging like a pendulum to the whims of the breeze.

He faced them, his muscles writhing, his face distorted with hate.

"Damn you," he yelled. "You'll never do it!"

He leaped for the saddle, landed in it, grabbed wildly for the reins, caught them and drove home the spurs.

It seemed that Banater had anticipated this move, for a rope appeared in his hands. A noose shot out, widened, and dropped neatly over Wetherell's shoulders as his horse lunged forward, pinning his arms to his sides and dragging him out of the saddle. He fell heavily, landing on his back. Before he could move Banater and Judd were upon him. The rope went around his legs, and presently he was stretched out, cursing.

His horse ran only a little distance and halted to graze. Teasdale caught it and led it back to a point near Wetherell and the Cross-in-a-Box men.

THEY paid no attention to Wetherell's cursing, or to his violent efforts to writhe free of the rope that bound him. Banater and Judd lifted him to the back of his horse, threw him crosswise of the saddle and lashed him to it. He fought vainly, and he was yelling curses at Teasdale, when there came a rapid beating of hoofs up the pass.

A girl on a horse burst into view from behind a slight bend. She had evidently witnessed the scene from a distance, and she was lashing the horse with a quirt, forcing the animal to ascend the slope of the pass with prodigious bounds. As she came nearer the Cross-in-a-Box men saw that her eyes were wide with startled inquiry, that her hair was in wild disorder from the wind that whipped down the pass,

and that when she saw the barricade she increased the speed of her horse under her. The animal made a frantic rush, a great leap, and cleared the barricade cleanly, alighting on the upper side and not halting its rush until it was brought down close to the four men.

Teasdale knew the rider. She was Wetherell's daughter. A beautiful girl. Teasdale remembered to have heard that she was about twenty. Her name was Della. She was tall for a woman, with a lithe, well-rounded figure. Her eyes were blue, but a much deeper blue than her father's and they were set under brows that were almost level. Her brows were surmounted by a rather wide, well-shaped forehead which was at this minute screened with strands of coppery hair which she was impatiently and nervously attempting to tuck into the side coils at the crown of her head. She did not succeed in this design, possibly because of her haste, and some stray wisps still curled at her temples.

She had evidently recognized the captive as her father before beginning her wild ride up the pass, but even if that had not been the case she would have known it was he now, because of his voice, which was pouring forth curses and threats in a furious stream.

Perhaps the sound of his voice did much to reassure her that no matter what may have happened to him he was still alive and uninjured, for as she now looked at the Cross-in-a-Box men and the figure which was lashed to the saddle, the excitement and apprehension appeared to vanish from her eyes. She seemed to make an effort toward calmness. She succeeded, and before she spoke her eyes grew defiant.

She looked at Teasdale, facing him and ignoring the others.

"Perhaps you will be good enough, to tell me what you are doing to my father," she said. She was angry, and her eyes flashed accusingly.

"Sure," returned Teasdale. "There ain't no secret about it, ma'am. You're his daughter, ain't you? Well, we saw him driving a bunch of Cross-in-a-Box yearlings through this pass here, and we nailed him. Clean case, ma'am. Caught in the act."

"You're a liar, Teasdale! That you, Della?"

"Yes, father," answered the girl. Ignoring the Cross-in-a-Box men she rode around Wetherell's horse, dismounted, stepped close to Wetherell and calmly and deliberately began to loosen the rope that bound him.

She gazed defiantly at Teasdale over the top of her father's horse, and Teasdale disconcertedly and embarrassedly started toward her, protesting: "You can't do that, ma'am!"

"Well, I shall! And I should like to see any one try to stop me! The idea of your accusing my father of wanting to steal your old cattle!"

"That's right, Della—" shouted Wetherell, his voice husky and strained. "They're lyin', that's what! They rode up here and saw me standin' here, and they saw the yearlings down at the bottom of the pass, and right off they accuse me of stealin' 'em. Hurry up and get me loose here." There was now a hopeful note in Wetherell's voice. It was apparent that he intended taking full advantage of his daughter's presence.

BANATER and Judd gazed inquiringly at Teasdale. The latter flushed, strode to the girl, stepped behind her, leaned over her shoulders, grabbed her arms at the elbows, and held her motionless.

"I tell you, you can't do this, ma'am. Wetherell's goin' with us."

For an instant there was an odd, tense silence. That this situation was unpleasant to both Banater and Judd was apparent by the pained, embarrassed expressions of their faces. It was obvious that they were unaccustomed to participating in acts of violence toward a woman, and it was equally obvious that Teasdale, now having grabbed the girl, was uncertain as to what to do next.

The girl, too, seemed speechless with amazement and incredulity, or both, for she stood motionless, passive, as if undecided. Wetherell suddenly became silent. It was as if he sensed that something unusual was taking place, and was waiting for some development which would inform him of its character.

And now into this strange silence came a voice. It seemed to come from a clump of post oak thicket that grew on the edge of a low butte between the level and the base of the mountain that formed the south side of the pass.

The girl, Teasdale, the Cross-in-a-Box men, and even Wetherell were motionless, listening, as the voice, echoing with a drawling, mocking, lingering resonance, reached their ears:

"Start reaching for the sky, you lady killers!"

Teasdale and his men obeyed. They did more. Teasdale stepped out from behind Wetherell's horse where he could be seen from the point at which the voice seemed to come; Banater and Judd turned their faces in that direction and Della likewise stepped away from her father and gazed interrogatively toward the butte.

The owner of the voice was invisible. If he was in the post oak thicket

he must have been concealed behind a rock barrier whose outlines could not be traced by the eyes that regarded it from the level. Perhaps if the intruder could have been seen, the behavior of the Cross-in-a-Box men might have been different, but it was the menace of the unseen and invisible that dissuaded them from any aggressive movement. All of them undoubtedly visualized a rifle barrel pointing in their direction with a pair of grim, watchful eyes glancing along the sights.

There was another moment of silence which was pregnant with uncertainty. And then the voice came again, tauntingly:

"Seems you guys know how to jump at conclusions. Give you some hoof tracks and a man standing still looking at something, and right away you produce a rustler. That man Wetherell came up the wash an hour after those yearlings were through the pass. I reckon he didn't even see them. I'm the guy that stole your yearlings!"

There was another long silence, and a low laugh floating from the butte broke it.

"There's going to be some jumping now, and you guys are going to do it. I'm giving you time to jump your cayuses down that dry wash into the basin, and if you don't fan it right smart straight down the basin I'm going to burn your hides plenty!"

Teasdale glared disgustedly at the butte. He walked to his horse, swung into the saddle, spurred the animal alongside the girl, said to her: "You win, ma'am," and headed his horse down the wash straight toward the basin. Banater and Judd followed him.

They rode straight out into the basin as directed. They didn't look back.

On the level Della Wetherell resumed her efforts to loosen the rope that bound her father to his horse. She freed him finally and helped him slide down to his feet, where he stood grinning maliciously at the distant Cross-in-a-Box men.

SILENCE came again to the level. Wetherell had coiled his rope and hung it from the saddle horn. Della had walked to her horse and taken up the reins, and now stood by the animal's head, stroking its muzzle. Somewhat impatiently she was awaiting the arrival of the rescuer. But it was apparent that the latter was still watching the movements of the Cross-in-a-Box men, who were still visible, and that he had no intention of making his appearance until he was reasonably certain that they were safely out of rifle shot.

Wetherell was impatient also, and there was a sly grin on his lips as he alternately watched the Cross-in-a-Box men and the butte.

And now the rescuer appeared. It was evident that he had concealed his horse at some distant point in the brush at the base of the mountain, for he now appeared riding the animal.

The horse was tall, black, superbly proportioned.

The rider was tall and slender. He rode close to Della and Wetherell, not seeming to notice them. His gaze was still upon the Cross-in-a-Box men who were dwarfed to toylike proportions upon the floor of the basin beyond the narrows.

The rider was arrayed in a brown woolen shirt, overalls that covered brown trousers, which were visible at the waist. The overalls were tucked into a pair of high-heeled, soft-topped boots equipped with spurs. Around his

waist was a cartridge belt and low on his right hip was a black leather holster and a heavy six-shooter. Around his neck was a bandanna, dark brown in color, and on his head was a gray felt hat of medium brim. Lying conveniently across the saddle in front of him was a rifle.

His hair was black, long, as if he and a barber had not met in recent months. He was bronzed, except where his forehead was exposed as he now removed his hat and bowed politely to Della, and his gray eyes seemed almost blue in contrast to the coppery hue of his skin.

His was a bold, strong face. He was not a handsome man, Della decided, but there was a gleam of something in the steady gray eyes, in the curve of the lips, and in the set of his head that indicated something more important than mere masculine beauty. This man's character was established. Whatever he was he would be to the end of his days, since there was nothing weak or vacillating in his character. She was aware of an interest in him which was unwarranted by what he had done.

He had brought with him an atmosphere of calmness, of confidence, of soothing imperturbability. It was as if his presence on the level was all that was needed to banish discord and violence. Yet the rifle balanced across his knees indicated his readiness to resort to the violence that his presence upon the level seemed to make inevitable.

"Ma'am," he said, looking straight at Della, "you certainly don't hesitate to fight for what you think is right, do you?"

"I certainly will fight for my father when I hear him unjustly accused," she returned.

"Then you think Teasdale was wrong, eh?" he said.

"Of course he was wrong! Didn't you tell Teasdale that you stole the yearlings?"

Furrowed wrinkles appeared around the rider's eyes. He seemed on the point of smiling, but his lips remained straight and his eyes appeared to be gravely regarding her.

"I lied, ma'am," he said softly. "I lied to keep Teasdale from hanging your dad. Your dad stole the yearlings."

CHAPTER III.

JIM BLAND'S GAME.

ONCE again silence reigned at the head of the pass. The girl stood rigid, amazed, incredulous. Wetherell stared at the rider. The rider shoved his rifle into the saddle scabbard, trailed the reins over the black's head, slid from the saddle and stood beside his horse looking at Wetherell.

The rider seemed taller on the ground than in the saddle. His shoulders seemed broader, his waist narrower, his legs longer.

"You're Wetherell, eh?" he said. "I gather, sir, that this lady is your daughter. But let's get this straight, sir. You stole the yearlings. I lied to Teasdale to keep him and his friends from dragging you away from your daughter to string you up. Is that right?"

Wetherell hung his head. He would not look at Della. His face flushed darkly.

"I reckon that's right," he answered; "I drove 'em over here because I had got sort of stuck on 'em. I was intendin' to pay for 'em, but them

boys didn't give me no chance. I reckon now I'll have to fix it up with Teasdale." He gazed inquiringly at the rider. "Who are you?" he questioned.

"Bland. Jim." His gaze was unwavering. Watching him closely, Della seemed to see a challenge in his eyes. She didn't see her father slyly wink an eye at him, but she did see Bland's lips twitch with an odd smile which seemed to her to convey a message to her father.

Wetherell had admitted appropriating the yearlings. That admission had stunned her, had revealed a trait of her father's character which she had not suspected. And the fact that this rider, Bland, had saved her father when he knew of her father's guilt, and that now he was speaking to her father, secretly, obviously so that she could not understand what was being said, indicated that there was between them a common interest, which certainly involved the drove of yearlings.

She now distrusted Bland. She doubted her father. Yet she permitted neither to divine that she was aware of the understanding they had consummated.

She deliberately smiled at Bland.

"I thank you for saving my father," she said. "I'm certain, of course, that his intentions were of the best. You see, he appreciates good stock, and he is quite willing to pay whatever Teasdale may ask for the yearlings. I think perhaps he felt that Teasdale would not sell the yearlings if he asked for them in the regular way." She turned, mounted her horse, wheeled him, flashed a smile at Bland, waved a hand at her father, leaped her horse over the barricade, and went skittering down the pass to vanish behind the bend around which she had previously appeared.

Bland and Wetherell watched her out of sight. Then Wetherell looked at Bland. Wetherell laughed.

"Seems we sort of understand each other, eh?"

"Maybe. Depends on what you mean."

"It's plain enough, Bland," said Wetherell. "You find me stealing a bunch of yearlings and you back my play. You tied up anywhere?"

Bland's eyes gleamed. "I'm on nobody's pay roll, if that's what you mean," he said.

"Looking for a job?"

"It's been some time since I've had a regular job."

Wetherell grinned. "Sort of sized you up that way," he said. "I like a man that ain't squeamish, and who knows enough to keep his mouth shut." Bland seemed uninterested.

"I don't aim to be tied down," he said.

"I know how you feel," returned Wetherell. "I've had to fight that off all my life. Coming out here was just another phase of my roving ideas. I'm not a cattleman, and maybe I never will be. But I've always wanted to be one. I wanted to own a ranch of my own. I used to dream about it, and I figured that if I ever got enough money I'd come out here and buy one."

"Sort of an ambition, eh? I didn't reckon you were a Western man or a cattleman, because if you had had any experience in rustling cattle you wouldn't have been so keen about running them off in the daylight when there was a chance of somebody seeing you. There's ways of running them off that's a whole lot slicker than your method. What's the name of your brand?"

"The Double Cross."

"New brand?"

"No. It belonged to the man I bought it from. Cummings."

BLAND'S interest in Wetherell appeared to end. He walked over to the barricade, examined it, returned to his horse, tested the cinch straps by pulling them, playfully patted the animal's muzzle and swung into the saddle.

Wetherell had watched him intently. Now, somewhat eagerly, he said: "You ain't interested, eh?"

"What's your proposition?"

"One hundred dollars a month. I'm needing a foreman."

"Straight salary, eh? That doesn't interest me, Wetherell."

"Wait till I get through. A hundred dollars a month and one per cent of the gross."

"You'll put that in writin'?"

"Any time you say."

"To-morrow night, Wetherell. Six o'clock. Where's your buildings?"

"Down this pass. Keep to the north edge of the basin. Cross the creek at the first shallow. Straight north from there. Through a woods. And you come to a level. Swing to your right. You hit a slope, and the creek again. Follow the creek and you run into my place. Six miles. You'll sure be there?"

"Six o'clock. If it was me, Wetherell, I'd get those yearlings out of sight. From the looks of that Teasdale man he ain't to be monkeyed with. It's likely he'll be back, on the prod."

"I got a place for them yearlings, all right," assured Wetherell.

"So long." Bland wheeled the black horse and rode down the dry wash into the west basin.

That had been the way the Cross-in-a-Box men had gone, and Wetherell watched Bland doubtfully for a mo-

ment until he remembered that the Cross-in-a-Box men had not seen Bland when he had interrupted them, and of course would not recognize him should he inadvertently come upon them. However, he expected that Bland knew what he was doing. In fact he had never met a man who impressed him as Bland had impressed him. He could use Bland. His intention was to use him to discomfit the cattlemen in the vicinity, and to enrich himself. That was the important thing, and he did not care how it was done.

He watched Bland until he saw that Bland was heading northward toward the creek that ran close to the buttes. The direction in which Bland was riding indicated that he intended to keep well away from the Cross-in-a-Box headquarters which were in the southern sweep of the basin. Wetherell mounted his horse, forced it to leap the barricade and rode down the pass.

He spent the remainder of the afternoon hazing the yearlings through a hilly region southeast of the pass, where at last they entered a draw which took them into a section of broken country featured by wide, shallow cañons and gorges. It was a wilderness country, heavily timbered, and here the yearlings were safe from any riders who might be searching for them.

It was late that night when Wetherell finally reached the Double Cross ranch house. His wife and daughter had retired. He prepared some food, ate it, and then sat for a long time on the wide veranda of the ranch house smoking and thinking.

THAT same night Bland and Teasdale were standing at the gate of the Cross-in-a-Box corral fence. The Cross-in-a-Box men were in the bunk house which was down the level

a little distance near a slope that ran down to the water. There was a light in the windows of the bunk house and the men's voices reached Teasdale and Bland.

"Banater and Judd were sure fussed up over Wetherell's getting off like that," said Teasdale. "They was burning to go back and salivate the galoot which busted up the party. I reckon if they knowed it was a frame-up they'd be speaking to you in a tone of voice right now."

"Then they didn't suspect anything, eh?" said Bland. "Thought it was a genuine rescue. Well, it sure took patience hanging around that mountain pass for two weeks, waiting for Wetherell to grab the bait. It went through all right, Teasdale. I'm working for the Double Cross beginning to-morrow night. Wetherell's giving me a hundred dollars a month and one per cent of the gross!"

"It's a dangerous business, Templeton. Wetherell's got a tough outfit. Gun-slingers, rustlers, plain bad men. If they suspect you, you won't have a chance. You won't have a chance anyway, for those guys will be crowdin' you because you'll be a new man."

"I'm Jim Bland, Teasdale—not Templeton. Don't forget. J. B. Templeton is known in this country to you alone. And so far as I know you're the only man in this section who knows that I own the Cross-in-a-Box."

Teasdale laughed.

"Well," he said, "it's a fool idea. And I think it won't work. I wish you luck in squaring things with Wetherell. Most men would have gone after Wetherell with the law or a gun. I don't know of any other man that would go at it the way you're going at it. But you've got a good start and you've got the nerve. Why, even your

name fits. Bland! That means smooth, quiet and slick. When you add nerve to that you've sure got some combination!"

CHAPTER IV.

FORBIDDEN FIRE.

TEASDALE was a secretive man. He was a friend, as well as the manager of Templeton's property. He was a hard taskmaster, and the personnel of the Cross-in-a-Box outfit was forever changing. The present outfit consisted almost entirely of new men, who had no knowledge of Templeton's identity. When Templeton had come and had confidentially informed Teasdale that he was to be known as Jim Bland, that information constituted an order which Teasdale religiously obeyed.

Bland, as he wished to be known, had also informed Teasdale of his purpose in assuming the alias. He had taken Teasdale into his confidence. A letter from Allan Farnsworth, a classmate in an Eastern college, had reached Bland at his ranch, known as the Rancho Seco, in southern Arizona at the Mexican border. He and Farnsworth had been intimate friends as well as classmates, and after finishing Farnsworth's letter Bland had sat for a long time gravely considering it.

Farnsworth had married a girl named Mary Addison, and Mary Addison had told him of a man named Wetherell who, she believed, had diverted the Addison estate to his own private purposes.

Wetherell had been executor of the estate. Mary had been too young and inexperienced in business matters to comprehend the details of the management of the estate, but when the crash

had come, and she had discovered that she was penniless, she had sought legal advice and had thereby come into contact with Farnsworth, who had been employed by the lawyers to whom she had applied.

Farnsworth had discovered that Wetherell had lost the Addison estate by making what appeared to be bad investments. There was no way of definitely proving that Wetherell's motives were dishonest; the most that could be proved against him was that his judgment was at fault, but still there remained the fact that the estate had been dissipated. Farnsworth's conclusions, which were supported by various transactions of which there were records, were that Wetherell had diverted the Addison funds to himself by the simple process of selling good stocks and reinvesting in worthless ones. Yet Wetherell had made his final report to the probate court and had been regularly discharged without criticism. He was beyond the law.

Wetherell had not been a rich man before serving as executor, but immediately afterward he had displayed considerable wealth. Farnsworth had discovered that he had speculated heavily, and that he had bought a ranch in Arizona.

There wasn't anything that Farnsworth could do about it. He was merely writing to Templeton because it had occurred to him that since Templeton's ranches were in Arizona he might have some knowledge of Wetherell's whereabouts and might be able to tell him, Farnsworth, how he could get in touch with Wetherell. He had discovered other details of Wetherell's transactions while executor, and although they were not conclusive enough to take before a court, they were sufficiently incriminating to lead him to believe that

if he personally faced Wetherell he might force the man to disgorge some portion of the appropriated funds. And that was what he intended doing should he be able to find where Wetherell had located.

He wasn't in the best of physical condition, he wrote. Shortly after joining the law firm which had handled Mary Addison's affairs he had been seriously injured in an accident and was now an invalid. Oh, he was able to get around a little. He could walk some and use his arms better than he had been able to use them for a while. But his earning power had been seriously impaired. He and Mary had started out with high hopes, but at present they were making a sorry mess of it.

There had been no complaining in the letter. Farnsworth wasn't that kind. But reading between the lines Templeton detected a note of hopelessness.

TEASDALE had written Templeton that a man named Wetherell had bought the neighboring Double Cross from Cummings, the former owner. So Templeton had packed a slicker, thrown a saddle on his horse and had ridden north to the Cross-in-a-Box to see Wetherell.

He had seen him. Teasdale had apprised him of the disappearance of two droves of yearlings, and although Templeton had no evidence as to who had perpetrated the theft, Templeton's thoughts had instantly gone to Wetherell. His surveillance of Wetherell had revealed Wetherell as the thief. He had intended to trap Wetherell and had succeeded. His plan had been to take Wetherell into the timber lying between the pass and the Cross-in-a-Box range, and there, under threat of hanging

him, to make him confess his many misdeeds and promise to make restitution to Mary Addison, Farnsworth's wife.

That scheme had been spoiled by the appearance of Della Wetherell, and he had been forced to drive the Cross-in-a-Box men off.

The plan had not worked as he had contemplated. He wondered if anything ever turned out as a man planned it. He had intended to be an agent of justice, but now he found himself obligated to play the rôle of spy.

Somehow this new rôle fascinated him. He knew that he was deliberately riding into danger, for Teasdale had warned him of the character of the men of Wetherell's outfit. And yet while these considerations moved him to serious thought, he was aware of a certain expression in Della Wetherell's eyes when he had bluntly apprised her of her father's theft of the Cross-in-a-Box yearlings.

He had observed her amazement over the disclosure, the swift glance of doubt and suspicion which she had given her father, and the distrust and hostility with which she had instantly regarded her informant. And then the quick, loyal defense of her father, and her instant plea that her father would pay for the yearlings.

Wetherell might be a thief, but his daughter certainly wasn't. And Jim Bland Templeton, sophisticated and somewhat cynical because of his contacts with various people here and there, and his experience, was conscious of an admiration for the girl's self-control, honesty and aggressiveness.

Thoughts of her were engaging him as early in the afternoon he was riding in a section of the country north of Deer Creek, upon a trail that would

take him ultimately to the Double Cross range. He had not followed Wetherell's directions. He knew the country, and since he had plenty of time he had decided to ride the high ground of the mountainous region that formed the rim of the Double Cross range.

The high ground was many miles distant. Intervening, was a wide, desolate stretch of sand, with clumps of cactus, and here and there, stretches of yucca and small sand hills, and the almost dry bed of Deer Creek winding along its edge to vanish into the first of a series of small hills. Beyond the hills was an upland, a long vast, desolate slope that ran eastward to join a mountain range.

This land formed a part of the Cross-in-a-Box range. There was grass here only for a few short weeks in the spring and the Cross-in-a-Box cattle avoided the range after the first grass vanished. The section was now dead and dry and was interesting to Bland only because it formed part of the range he owned.

It sent its hot, dry breath against him as he rode; the black horse and himself forming an infinitesimal blot upon the vast expanse of dun, dry country. Miniature whirlwinds of light, feathery dust formed near him. Some of them flattened instantly, collapsing at their inception and creating small balloon-like puffs. Others started in a more substantial manner, ascended in graceful spirals and danced away into the distance, growing larger as they receded.

These whirlwinds, formed of the more unsubstantial substances of the sand, were merely dust motes that were as light as the air, and they spread and floated skyward until they formed a gauze-like veil which stretched from the ground to the zenith, upon which

the sun wrought fantastic, tinted colors that ebbed and flowed with constantly changing patterns.

ALL the great upland stretch seemed to form a base for the magic veil.

Along its crest were lighter combinations of the colors. This was the north light, from behind the upland, coming from a section of country where the atmosphere was clearer.

Movement along the crest of this upland caught Bland's eyes as he rode. A string of dots, moving rapidly, too far away to be identified. But something about their size, and a certain peculiarity of form which Bland's keen eyes were able to detect, convinced him that the dots were cattle. And they were running.

He watched them in some perplexity. He knew the habits of cattle, and he was aware that they didn't run unless something startled them, or unless they were being driven.

He halted his horse and sat motionless in the saddle, shading his eyes with his hands against the brilliant colors of the gauze veil. And then he saw behind the cattle a group of other dots scurrying along.

Rustlers. Cowboys didn't press a herd of cattle like that. These riders were men who were seeking a covert for the cattle. They were recklessly driving them, hoping to get them off the skyline before being seen. They were heading eastward, and that meant that somewhere on the western range they had cut out this herd.

Bland rode on. His interest in the cattle he had seen, and in the riders that were driving them, was only perfunctory. They couldn't be Cross-in-a-Box stock, for Teasdale's men were on the western range far south of the mountains, and only last night Teasdale had

told him that they expected to penetrate still farther south.

It might be that these were riders from some distant range rounding up stray cattle for spring sale. Ranchers hard pressed financially, sometimes shipped old beeves and worn out breeders in the spring.

Bland rode on slowly, through the inferno of heat and sand. He kept to the level, which took him around the bases of the various systems of hills and ridges, and about mid afternoon, with the sun at his back, he was riding the crest of the upland where he had seen the cattle and the riders.

There were possibly a hundred steers, he decided, examining the hoof tracks as he rode along, and perhaps a dozen horsemen had been trailing them.

Behind Bland was a wide, vast sweep of rolling country; southwestward were the mountains, the valleys and the plains of the Cross-in-a-Box range stretching away to the horizon. North and east was a wild, broken section of country where mountains and hills and cañons were spread into unending space. Straight eastward the upland merged into a low, vast mesa. Somewhere in the eastern distance the upland formed a rim of the mesa, and below the mesa was a forest of spruce and fir that sloped down to a far level. Beyond the forest, somewhere, was the Double Cross.

Bland had no desire to ride the upland trail to the mesa, and so presently he sent the black down a wash to the lower ground.

IT seemed that the riders who had been trailing the cattle had had the same impulse, for the hoof tracks also went down the wash to the lower level. Bland had no thought of trail-

ing the cattle, for he had traveled a leisurely pace and he knew that by this time the herd and its convoy should be miles ahead. Possibly they had been riders from a ranch somewhere in the north, and knew of a pass through the mesa country.

Bland's interest in them was ended, and when he saw the hoof tracks going down into a gorge that led into a heavily timbered valley he sent the black horse southward, away from the tracks, realizing that he was now at the edge of the Double Cross range, and north of the creek that Wetherell had told him to follow.

But after riding a mile or so southward he found the trail blocked by a long line of ragged buttes that formed the north course of the creek. He was forced to veer northward again into the forest and he rode down a slope into a valley. There was no trail here, and so he was forced to find his own. Some buttes again blocked his way and he again had to breast the thick growth of trees and the wild heavy underbrush that seemed to fill the floor of the valley under the rim of the mesa. He was steadily pushing the black horse against the forest barriers when he burst unexpectedly into a small clearing.

And there were the cattle. They had been running. They were tired. Dozens of them were resting. Other dozens were standing with braced legs and lowered heads, and still others were slowly milling. Their eyes had the wild, defiant stare that comes with a mental condition peculiar to cattle, which is explained by the phrase "on the prod," which, interpreted, means fighting mad.

The riders that Bland had seen were also in the clearing. They had evidently just brought the cattle to a halt, and

they had undoubtedly heard him coming, for they sat on their horses in a big semicircle on the other side of the clearing. They were all facing him and were watching him steadily.

And now Bland observed that not all of them were mounted, and he realized he had erred in thinking that they had just arrived. They must have been here for some time, for at the edge of the clearing they had built a small fire. Three men were standing near the fire. Like the others, they were facing Bland, and Bland observed that the ends of several branding irons were in the fire.

The riders were rustlers. The fact that they intended branding the herd of cattle in the forest was proof that they were not honest cattlemen.

Bland said nothing. There was nothing he could say to explain his sudden breaking in upon their activities. He sat in the saddle looking at them.

And then he became aware that one of the men at the fire, a man of about his own size and age, with a shock of wild, unruly black hair, and fierce, truculent eyes, had drawn a six-shooter, which was tight against his right hip, its muzzle pointing straight at him.

The man laughed shortly, with passion.

"So you saw us, eh?" he said. "Well, get an eyeful, because it's the last one you'll ever get."

CHAPTER V.

BRAND-RUNNERS.

THE fierce-eyed man's injunction to Bland was unnecessary.

For already Bland had used his eyes.

First, he had seen the Double Cross

brand upon several of the horses, and therefore he was certain that the men riding them belonged to the Double Cross outfit. He knew that the act of branding upon the open range indicated that the steers were either mavericks or stolen stock. They were not mavericks, at least all of them were not, for he had observed that they bore various brands, among which the Cross-in-a-Box predominated. Therefore here was evidence that some of his own stock was being run off by the Double Cross outfit.

Also Bland's keen gaze had comprehended the character of the men who were facing him. Like the man who had drawn his gun, they were, with possibly one or two exceptions, the sort of men that one would expect to engage in the crime of stealing another man's cattle.

They were watching him intently, with level, hostile eyes, but they had the advantage of numbers, and they would make no movement until they received orders from the leader.

Bland appeared to ignore the leader's words; he seemed not to see the gun whose muzzle was pointing directly at him. He sat erect in the saddle, frowned and swept the circle of men with a sharp, accusing glance.

"What are you hanging around here for?" he inquired sharply. "Run the irons on them and fan it out of here!"

There was a startled, concerted stiffening of bodies. The riders sat erect, the men standing near the fire snapped to attention. The leader's muscles moved convulsively; he stared at Bland in amazement.

Bland saw the men exchange furtive, astonished and incredulous glances, saw them finally look at their leader inquiringly.

The leader stepped out toward

Bland. He was crouching. His gaze was malignant and derisive. The gun in his hand had wavered at Bland's words, but now it was level and rigid.

"Givin' orders, eh?" he said. "Well, come clean or I'll bore you!"

"I'm Bland, the new Double Cross foreman."

The leader started, stared.

Some of the rigidity went out of him. His gaze was still derisive and still retained some of its malignancy, but in his eyes was now a gleam of curiosity and new interest. He said slowly, uncertainly: "Wetherell was tellin' me about you. But he didn't say about you runnin' into this deal."

Bland's eyes met the leader's. There was a short, sharp conflict of wills and the leader's eyes wavered.

"Who are you?" snapped Bland.

"I'm Punditt, the straw boss." He was now sullen, his lips curved crookedly.

"Right," said Bland. "Get a move on you! You've got some Cross-in-a-Box steers, and I saw Teasdale and his outfit riding north through Eagle's Pass. Looked to me like they'd picked up your trail. You'd better not wait to run the irons on those steers. You'd better fan it out of here, pronto!"

There was an instant of silence, of nervous and apprehensive indecision, during which the eyes of every man in the outfit intently searched Bland's face. He sat in the saddle facing them, frowning.

PUNDITT stood uncertain, sullen. Then he turned. Instantly the three men at the fire drew the branding irons from the flames. They dived for a small water hole at the edge of the clearing, plunged the partly heated irons into the water where they sizzled and cooled.

The riders were now in motion. Punditt leaped into the saddle, the outfit circled the herd, started them eastward down a wash, snapping their quirts and yelling. The men with the branding irons followed. A cloud of dust rose from the clearing, and moved down the wash and finally vanished far down in a level at a distance.

Bland was alone in the clearing. He dismounted, stamped the fire out, mounted and sat in the saddle gazing at the long line of dust that was now slowly settling into the trees and the wild underbrush. He rode on, following the river bed, moving at a leisurely pace. For though he had been somewhat delayed he still had an hour or two to ride the short distance to the Double Cross ranch.

He was wondering about the Double Cross outfit. Teasdale had clearly described them. Their hard, reckless eyes, the threat and menace of their glances as they had inspected him while Punditt had been talking to him plainly revealed them. They were outlaws, and it was entirely possible that Wetherell had known that fact when he had employed them.

Bland had particularly observed two of the men, however, that he was almost certain had no liking for the work in which they were engaged. One, a blond young giant, slim and lithe, with keen blue eyes which had seemed to gleam with interest and friendliness as they looked at him, indicated to Bland that their owner was not in sympathy with Punditt.

It had seemed also that the blond giant had suspected that Bland's concern had not been entirely for the herd of cattle, for when leaving with the others he had lagged slightly behind them and had appeared to deliberately close one eye at Bland.

The other exception was a much smaller man than the giant, a dark-haired, dark-eyed rider with a long nose, long upper lip and prominent upper teeth. A receding chin, with a lower lip that seemed always to be lurking under the edge of the upper teeth, thus giving his mouth the appearance of being continually upon the verge of curving into a smile, gave Bland a glimpse of his character, which Bland felt was dominated by a cynically humorous attitude toward his fellows. He, too, had caught Bland's eye and a droll smile had twitched at his mouth.

For some reason which was not apparent to Bland these two men were not in sympathy with Punditt.

Remembering Punditt, his wild eyes and his passionate challenge, Bland could understand how such men as the blond giant and the rider who had smiled at him would be somewhat unimpressed by their leader, if not actually derisive. These were men who did their own thinking. They might submit to Punditt's leadership, but they would have no admiration for him.

Bland considered Punditt as he rode down a slope to the floor of the valley close to the river. Punditt alone, of all the men in the outfit, had betrayed passion at his appearance in the clearing. And it seemed to Bland that this passion had not been entirely provoked by his catching the men in the act of preparing to brand steers that did not belong to the Double Cross, but that there had been something personal in it.

BLAND had encountered this phenomenon many times. Something of a man's character, shining out of his eyes, expressed in the set of his head, the lines of his lips, or in certain mannerisms, became instantly an affront and an insult to another. That,

he concluded, was what had happened between himself and Punditt.

No fear that Bland had been riding sign on the Double Cross outfit, or that he was an intruder who sought trouble, had assailed Punditt; it had been Bland's personal appearance that had aroused the Double Cross straw boss. It had been something that he had seen in Bland, mental or physical superiority, which had aroused Punditt's envy or jealousy. And Bland knew that whatever his relations with the other men of the outfit, he would from this time forward be subjected to Punditt's antagonism, hostility and hatred.

However, he had met men like Punditt before and he had always felt for them the same contempt that he now felt for Punditt.

He had not been perturbed by Punditt's manner, and there in the clearing he had used his eyes as well as his wits and he had seen the Cross-in-a-Box brand upon sixteen steers. The Arrow brand—which belonged to a rancher named Owens thirty miles north of Deer Creek—was upon a score of others.

Among the stolen herd were some mavericks which may have been the property of any of the ranchers in the vicinity. The mavericks should not have been driven off in this manner, however; they should have been permitted to roam the ranges until the fall round-up, when they would have been thrown into the common herd and divided among the ranchers participating in the round-up.

Altogether there had been ninety-eight steers in the herd. Bland had counted them as they had filed down the wash from the clearing.

And now coming closer to the Double Cross ranch house, Bland was wondering about Wetherell. The ques-

tion was, had Wetherell's outfit stolen the cattle with Wetherell's knowledge and approval, or had the outfit, led by Punditt, made the drive without Wetherell's knowledge?

He rather thought that Wetherell knew about it. Wetherell had proved his character. And now as Bland rode up to the gallery of the Double Cross ranch house and halted his horse, he was thinking about Della. How much did she know of Wetherell's character? Of the men who composed the Double Cross outfit? How much did Mrs. Wetherell know?

Della, he had heard, was about twenty years of age. Therefore Mrs. Wetherell had been Wetherell's wife for more than a score of years. Could a woman live with a man that long without being as familiar with his character as with her own?

He sat in the saddle, engrossed with his conjectures. He had pushed his hat back from his forehead and was absently scratching his head when he observed that the front door of the house was open and that Della was standing in it looking at him.

He started, smiled with slight embarrassment over the knowledge that Della had witnessed his abstraction.

Della was rigid and was gazing at him with steady, unsmiling eyes.

"Oh, it's you!" she said. "I had no idea that I should have the—pleasure of seeing you again!"

CHAPTER VI.

UNWELCOME.

JIM BLAND was aware of the hostility in Della's voice. He was aware, too, of a respect for her which had been created at their first meeting, when after he had frankly

told her that her father had stolen the Cross-in-a-Box yearlings, he had observed her amazement at the news, and her reluctance to believe it. He was aware, too, that the hostility she now exhibited, had been born in her when she had realized that he, Bland, was a rustler who before her eyes had seemed to mutely applaud her father's theft of the Cross-in-a-Box yearlings. Again he was impressed by her loyalty and uncompromising honor.

Her knowledge of her father's crime was undoubtedly tragedy to her, and Bland sympathized with her. And his own action, that of engaging himself to work for Wetherell, constituted a threat of further tragedies which would inevitably descend upon her.

He had come here to ruin Wetherell, and to regain for Farnsworth and Mary Addison the fortune that had been stolen from them by Della's father. But now he knew that he could not ruin Wetherell without ruining Wetherell's family.

He was going ahead; but there was now left in him little of the grim vindictiveness that he had felt prior to his first meeting with Della.

He had found himself admiring the girl. In the pass, when she had been facing him, he had been aware of the clear depths of her deep blue eyes, of the affection in them when she had looked at her father, of the shadows that had crossed them when her parent had been accused, and he had wondered then if there was anything in the theory of heredity.

Certainly Wetherell didn't deserve to have such a daughter.

He liked the girl, but he could not permit his consideration of her feelings to divert him from his purpose. Yet his fight was not to be directed against her, but against her parent, and

he did not permit his face to change expression. He was grave, courteous. He doffed his hat, disclosing his black hair, and the wide forehead, untouched by the sun.

"I didn't think you'd be so selfish as to consider only your own feelings, ma'am," he said. "Maybe one of us is getting pleasure out of this meeting."

Her lips curved scornfully.

"Will you please tell me why you are here?" she questioned.

He was singularly pleased with her. In her manner was the hostility that might have been expected from a daughter who suspected that a rustler was trying to establish an intimate relationship with her father. It indicated consistency.

He sat in the saddle looking at her. Her gaze was level and steady, but he observed that she looked at him as if studying him and wondering about him. He slowly turned his hat in his hands.

"I've no objections, ma'am. I'm the new Double Cross range boss."

She started. Her eyes flashed. She seemed dismayed.

"Do you mean to say that father has hired you?" she said, after a silence.

"Correct, ma'am. I was to meet your dad here at six, this evening. It's nearly that now."

"Well, father isn't here, and of course you can't go to work until you see him."

"It isn't important that your dad isn't here, ma'am. I'm hired. If you'll just point out the foreman's shanty I'll go there and wash up. Maybe Wetherell will have arrived by the time I finish."

She walked to the edge of the gallery and stood within half a dozen feet of him. She seemed to be very calm,

very composed, but he observed that her lips were white.

"I WONDER if you understand that you are not wanted here?" she demanded. "You are taking advantage of father. You happened to be near him when he permitted his yearning for the Cross-in-a-Box yearlings to overcome his judgment and you used that situation to force him to give you a job. You made it look as if you had saved his life—had prevented Teasdale and his men from hanging him. But you didn't. They would not have dared to do it. You shan't work here! I want you to leave here before father comes!"

Bland put his hat on, pulled the brim down over his eyes, and bowed to her. He was polite, but his determination to stay was quite as unalterable as her insistence that he should leave. He knew sincerity when he saw it, and he could not help admiring Della for her attempt to keep her father from being, as she supposed, imposed upon by a stranger. He was secretly pleased over her exhibition of spirit, but he had no intention of obeying her.

"Sorry, ma'am," he said quietly, "but I reckon I'm staying. And I expect I'll be able to find the foreman's shanty without any trouble."

He glanced around at the buildings, the level, at the corral which spanned the river at a shallow, at the empty basin which was just now glowing under the soft colors of the sunset. Then he looked back at Della.

"The outfit's away, I reckon, ma'am? Don't tell me that the cook is gone too, and that I'll have to rustle my own grub."

His pretense of anxiety brought a derisive smile to her lips.

"You think you're very clever, I

suppose," she said coldly. "But do you imagine I'm concerned over your appetite?"

"Why, ma'am, I wasn't thinking that you are concerned about me at all. I was just thinking aloud, I expect. I'm certainly sorry I bothered you."

He wheeled the black horse, rode to the horse corral, dismounted, opened the gate, led the black inside, pulled the saddle and bridle from him, threw the saddle over his shoulder, strode through the gateway, closed the gate, walked to the stable and hung the bridle and saddle from some pegs in the stable wall.

Emerging from the stable, he stretched himself, lit a cigarette and walked up the river bank to a group of buildings several hundred yards north of the ranch house. They were the mess and bunk houses, a blacksmith's shop, some sheds and other buildings. A few hundred feet farther on the bank of the river close to the edge of a clump of timber, was another building. This was the foreman's shanty.

The door was open. He entered, inspected the interior, then went out again, closed the door after him and inspected the other buildings.

There was no one about. He entered the mess house, cooked and ate supper, found a seat on a bench outside the bunk house and sat there smoking, waiting for Wetherell.

The ranch house was visible to him through a clump of intervening trees, and beyond the ranch house to right and left he could see the floor of the valley sweeping away for many miles to the purple bases of the southern hills. Westward he could see the pass in the mountain wall down which Wetherell had driven the yearlings.

The Double Cross buildings, the corral and a section of good grass land

were sheltered from the north winds of winter by the mountain range that lifted its ragged peaks a mile or two northward. There was considerable distance between the ranch buildings and the mountains, some grass covered hills that would afford pasture when the snow covered the levels. However, water was not so plentiful.

Deer Creek had a wide, sandy bed just here, which was deep enough to hold the rush of water that came down from the mountains in the early spring, but now there was a mere trickle in the center of the river bed, with here and there a water hole that was formed from the natural depressions. Deer Creek flowed from west to east. It came from the divide at the extreme limit of the Cross-in-a-Box range.

BLAND saw no cattle anywhere. There were a few horses in a small corral which spanned the creek near the bunk houses. Bland sat on the bench in front of the bunk house for a long time. He saw no sign of Wetherell.

Twice he caught glimpses of a calico-clothed figure on the gallery. It was Della. She too was expecting Wetherell, and was impatient. He saw her shading her eyes with her hands as she gazed into the basin southward. He saw her again when the soft colors of the afterglow shone upon her, and a sensation of loneliness engulfed him.

She wasn't interested in his appetite. In fact she appeared not to be interested in him at all except to the extent, apparently, of wishing him elsewhere.

Of course he couldn't blame her.

But he went to bed that night, in the foreman's shanty, and as he stretched out he was conscious of a certain wistfulness, of an inarticulate and inexplicable yearning.

And his dreams were slightly troubled. Della appeared in all of them. He saw her watching him with scornful, accusing eyes.

Her expression troubled him, as it had not troubled him during his waking moments. It seemed to him when once he partially awakened, that his senses while dreaming were more acute and perhaps more receptive. For in his dreams he regretted what had happened.

Twice he spoke aloud and his voice awakened him.

"Why, ma'am," he said, "there's times when all of us do things that we don't want to do. But once we get started there's no way to stop."

And again:

"Would knowing I'm not a rustler make any difference?"

He was aware, hazily, of the images that sleep had brought him and he smiled ironically.

"Shucks," he said aloud, reproaching himself; "I wasn't thinking that this would happen."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLOND GIANT.

AT dawn Bland was up. He went to the corral, fed and watered the black horse, rubbed him down, then found soap and a towel and went up the creek a little distance to a water hole, where he bathed. He went to the mess house, breakfasted, then walked up and down the creek for some little distance, inspecting the Double Cross layout.

The sun was above the mountain peaks when he returned to the foreman's shanty. He stood in the doorway, smoking. He could see no signs that Wetherell had returned. No horse

had been added to the others already in the corral, and none had been turned into the stable.

Smoke was curling lazily from the chimney of the ranch house, indicating that the occupants were astir.

Bland had no plans. He had expected Wetherell to keep his word about meeting him at the ranch house, and he intended to stay where he was until Wetherell appeared.

Half an hour later he saddled the black horse, mounted and rode straight south, across the basin, intending to take a look at the country beyond the mountains.

In order to avoid riding through a rocky section near the corral gates he was forced to circle the east end of the corral fence, which brought him within two or three hundred yards of the ranch house. As he rode eastward toward the corner of the fence he saw Della standing motionless on the gallery. She had been watching him, and even at that distance he could detect defiance in her attitude; and when she observed that he saw her she abruptly turned, crossed the gallery and entered the house.

Bland was stirred oddly over her obvious though natural hostility.

"She certainly hasn't changed her mind since last night," was his thought. "When she makes up her mind it seems she makes it up for keeps. Well, I reckon that's the way any one's mind ought to be run."

There was admiration in his thoughts of her. She had not got her moral sturdiness from her father. From her mother, most likely. He hadn't seen the mother yet, but he had already decided that Della must resemble her.

A mile out from the ranch house he halted the black and gazed about him

to have another look at the country surrounding the ranch buildings. He caught the flutter of a calico dress on the gallery, and he rode on.

"I reckon she ain't interested in us, Blackie," he remarked to the horse. "She's just curious to see where we're going."

It was noon when he got through a pass in the southern mountain wall, and from a high shoulder on the southern side he could look out and down upon a wild expanse of country.

The land had a downward trend. Spreading eastward, westward and southward from the mountain range were systems of water courses with their divides, their valleys, their hills and their inevitable levels. He could see sand flats, forests, alkali plains, and malpais stretching away until distance swallowed them.

He sat for perhaps an hour on the shoulder of the mountain carefully scrutinizing the country, and when after a while he detected movement in a gorge several miles away, he smiled.

The yearlings that Wetherell had stolen were there. They were well hidden. If a man were to search for them from any other direction it was unlikely that he could see them.

Before Bland descended from the mountain to the pass he carefully scanned the basin through which he had ridden. He saw no one, and so he rode out of the pass, into the basin, made a wide, long circle and went back to the ranch house.

HE jogged down the level to the horse corral, and while removing the saddle and bridle from the black horse he saw a man sitting on the bench in front of the bunk house. He also observed that there was another horse in the corral and that another

saddle and bridle were suspended from the wall pegs where he had put his own.

He thought at first that the horse and saddle belonged to Wetherell, but when returning toward the foreman's shanty he passed the bunk house and recognized the man as the blond young giant he had seen with the Double Cross outfit the day before in the clearing with the stolen cattle.

He nodded to the man, stopped in front of him.

"You're back, eh?" he said.

"Yep."

The blond young man looked up, grinned with some diffidence, and looked down again. He was smoking a cigarette, and now he rolled it in his fingers and appeared to be gravely considering the ash on its tip and the thin blue spiral of smoke that curled from it.

"Shucks," he said, "that was a funny thing."

"You mean your coming back?" inquired Bland.

"Yep. Hoss got lamed right bad. Couldn't keep up with the others. Punditt cussed some, but told me I'd better drop out and come on back."

He looked up at Bland again, and his eyes were swimming with some emotion that Bland could not fathom.

"I was sure plumb disappointed at not bein' able to hit town with the boys after selling them steers, and I reckon I done a lot of cussin', which didn't do me nor the hoss any good."

"What lamed him?"

The blond young giant chuckled.

"That was the joke of it, suh. After the other boys had gone on I got to fussin' around with my hoss, and I found a stone in the frog of his right forehoof. Sure, after I took the stone out the hoss got over the lameness

mighty quick. But by that time the boys had gone so far ahead that I knowed there was no use of tryin' to catch up with them. So I come on back."

He now met Bland's gaze fairly and smiled genially. "I'm Jed Lefingwell. Mostly called Jeff, on account of me comin' from Georgia."

"I reckon you know I'm Jim Bland."

Jeff nodded lazily. "I heard you tellin' Punditt," he said. "Seems you sort of surprised Punditt, bustin' into the clearin' that way. Thought at first Punditt aimed to down you."

Bland smiled. "Seems I saw that thought of yours running clear down to your gun hand," he said. "When I first saw your gun out I figured that you were intending to back Punditt's play. I was right relieved when I saw the muzzle of your gun covering Punditt. When a man's working with an outfit he's supposed to be working with them, isn't he?"

"Depends on what the outfit's intendin' to do," said Jeff. "Killin' folks just for them askin' questions ain't my style." He smiled expansively, and his eyes danced with an engaging light. "I ain't admirin' Punditt none, and I'm sort of partial toward grass ropes. I seen you had a grass rope, and I figured if you was bad you couldn't be all bad."

"**F**OLKS who use grass ropes have trustin' dispositions," said

Bland, gravely. "But I've noticed that they're always pretty accurate reading a man's character by looking at him."

"You been readin' mine?" grinned Jeff.

"I'd sure have more confidence in you if it wasn't for that lame horse."

"Shucks, mister. Don't hold that ag'in me. I'm sort of tired of helpin' Punditt steal other folks' cattle. Of course that don't explain how the stone got in that frog. But I'm back here and I ain't mournin' over it."

"Do you think Punditt knows that the stone had any help?" suggested Bland.

"Huh, Punditt would have to have help himself to find that out."

"You're not admiring Punditt any, I take it?"

"Did you hear me singin' his praises? I reckon not. Where I was raised, if they was countin' men, they wouldn't seen Punditt."

"Punditt's bad, I reckon," said Bland.

"You had other ideas there in the clearin', mister. Once you was thinkin' of throwin' your gun."

"You're a mighty discerning man, Jeff," said Bland. "I'm wondering if you know how long it will take Punditt to get rid of that herd and get back to the Double Cross."

"He drives 'em north to the Bear Paw, to a greaser he calls José. He'll have to hump to make the drive in a week. It'll take him a day to get the money, and another day ridin' west, to a town called Blinn. A day and a night in town and three days more to ride back. That's two weeks, about. Say twelve days from now to make it sure."

Bland's face was grave. "I reckon you'll spend the twelve days curing that horse's lame foot, eh?"

Jeff smiled. "That's what I'll be tellin' Punditt. The horse is lame, though, and if Wetherell sees him he'll know I wasn't lyin'. And sure I'll rope me another cayuse from the corral. Wetherell won't let me do no loafin'."

"Wetherell isn't here now."

"He's in town then, I reckon. Lazette," he continued, observing Bland's glance of inquiry. "At the foot of the valley. Sixty miles or thereabouts. He takes spells. Likes his liquor. He'll be back when he gets here." And now watching Bland quizzically, he gently slapped a knee and laughed lowly.

"I'm cussed if you know!" he said finally.

He stared at Bland's puzzled eyes and chuckled with huge mirth.

"Now ain't that rich?" he questioned of the silent hills and the yawning desolation.

"I reckon it's rich, whatever it is," conceded Bland. "And it must be a heap funny to set you cackling like that. I'm beginning to believe that grass ropes are not what they're expected to be."

Jeff's face sobered. "Shucks," he said evenly. "I reckon I been runnin' too fast. And maybe I've talked too much."

"You're certainly going to do some explaining before I'll know what you're talking about," said Bland shortly. "I'm a good guesser except when somebody's asking riddles to which there don't seem to be any answers."

"Sure, I've done it now," said Jeff. "But I sure thought you knowed, the way you been talkin' and lookin' at me. Me and Shorty Quillan are Cross-in-a-Box men. Teasdale sent us over here to get a job six weeks ago, before you got here."

Bland's first thought was that Teasdale had violated his confidence. The second and even more disquieting thought was that Jeff was a shrewd guesser, trying to bluff Bland into a damning admission.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Bandits of the Cylinder

Science plays a great part in crime, in the America of 1981, but Franklin Dirk of the secret service finds that nerve and brains are still all-important

Novelette—Complete

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Tama, Princess of Mercury," "Tama of the Light Country," etc.



CHAPTER I.

BLUE RAYS OF DEATH.

DIRK and I both saw the flash—the small blue beam of a ray-gun on a shadowed rise of ground ahead and to the left of us. I shoved on the brakes and slowed down.

"A shot, chief!"

"Yes. Looked like it."

Then we saw three more. They seemed coming from the doorway of a small house set in a grove of trees a few hundred feet back from the traffic viaduct. Some one was standing up there firing into the night.

Dirk leaned over and shouted: "Unfold the wing! We'd better hop up there and find out what's going on."

We were rolling along the viaduct at twenty or thirty miles an hour. It was about 3 A.M., and there chanced to

be no cars passing in this segment at the moment. I turned a switch. The wing came out over us, but still I held us to the road.

There were shouts coming from the little hill now—an uproar there.

"Jac, look! Somebody making off!" We saw the blob of a figure running down the hill away from the house. "Lift us!" Dirk added. "Land in there—see what the devil it's all about."

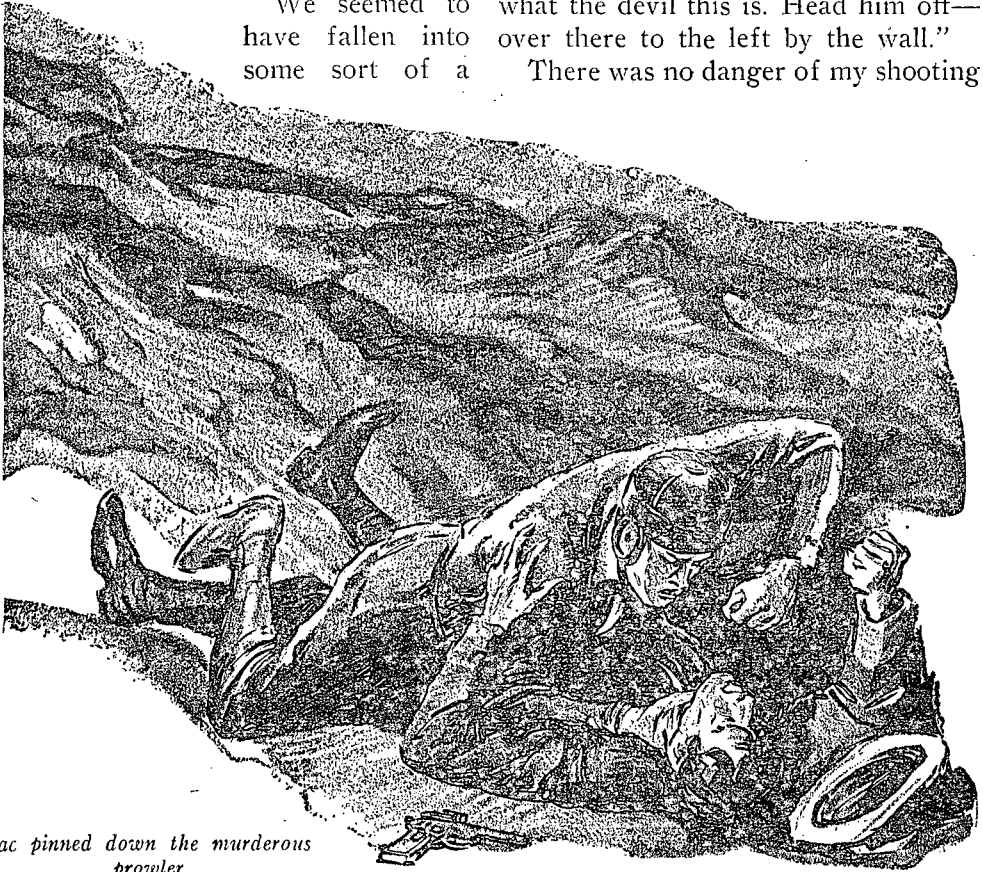
The house was a trifle ahead of us and to the left. I put on the power and raised us off the road. We skimmed over the viaduct parapet and missed the first of the tall elm trees by inches. There was no moon this night. The house on the brow of the hill showed vaguely in the starlight. The shouts up there had suddenly stopped. But we could see the escaping figure slanting down the other side of the hill.

"Land us!" Dirk repeated. "There's an open space—over by that path! Drop us down!"

We seemed to have fallen into some sort of a

he goes, Jac! Under that line of trees!" Dirk was off on a run. He flung back at me: "Don't shoot him—can't tell what the devil this is. Head him off—over there to the left by the wall."

There was no danger of my shooting



Jac pinned down the murderous prowler

crime. Franklin Dirk, my chief, was at this time consulting criminologist in government service. We were returning this night in 1981 to our office in Great-New York from a week's vacation in Canada. Under Dirk's vehemence I brought our Bat down with a bump into the soft ground of what seemed to be a flower bed.

The wheels mired in and the up-tilting stern tumbled us out; but we had done that so many times before that we landed safely like cats on our feet.

Dirk had his gun in hand. "There

any one. My gun was locked up in the car; it would have taken me ten minutes to unpack it.

"Watch yourself," Dirk shouted. "Keep back—go down by the end of the wall!"

I ran that way. The figure had momentarily disappeared. Dirk slipped into a heavy clump of shrubbery. I lost sight of him; then I saw him drawn up cautiously behind the trunk of a tree. The stone and concrete wall was a barrier before me. It was twelve or fifteen feet high—too smooth and too high to mount. Our quarry undoubtedly had not climbed over it.

I dropped flat into a little hollow and lay listening. The fugitive had to be near by, for we had seen him come down this slope. Our abrupt arrival had sent him plunging off toward the wall, and when he found he couldn't climb it there was no time to get back past us.

FROM two hundred feet to the side of me suddenly came Dirk's voice.

"Hi, there! Stop, or I'll flash you! Stop, I say!"

A man's figure came lunging from a thicket almost directly at me. He had seen Dirk, but not me. Dirk's blue-beam flashed into the trees over our heads with its simultaneous little thunder-clap. I rose up as the fellow passed and caught his legs. He came down with a bump; the gun in his hand was knocked away from him.

We rolled in the hollow. I am a pretty solid six-footer; this antagonist felt considerably smaller. He threshed and banged at my face with his fists, but I had him pinned in a moment and was sitting on his chest when Dirk dashed up.

"Good enough, Jac! Lift him up. Watch out for his weapons."

I climbed off him and yanked him to his feet.

"Put your hands out," I told him.

"Search him, Jac," said Dirk.

"I got no weapons," the fellow panted.

"He had a gun, chief. It's on the ground over there."

Dirk picked up the gun. I snapped the steel over our captive's wrists.

"You got no right doin' that," he protested.

"Haven't we?" said Dirk. "That can come later. What were you doing up at that house?"

He was a slim, pale-faced fellow in his early twenties. He stared at his

feet sullenly while Dirk searched him. He had no additional weapons. Nothing on him at all that seemed criminal.

From up at the house a man was calling down to us. "You down there—what are you doing?"

"We'll go up," said Dirk. "Come on you. What's your name?"

But our prisoner only stared at us dumbly. We pushed him between us up the slope of the hill toward the house.

"Don't want to talk, eh?" said Dirk.

I laughed. "He's been nipped before, chief. He's busy thinking."

"I wasn't at the house," the fellow said abruptly.

"No?" I retorted. "Where were you running from, and why?"

"I was crossin' the hill. I seen shootin' an' it scared me so I ran."

"That all?" Dirk demanded.

"Yes, that's all. You let me go. I done nothin' you can nip me for."

"We'll see what they say at the house," said Dirk.

IT seemed a more or less routine burglary. The house was occupied by a bachelor, one Robert Rance. He was a government employee in the Postal Service—a traffic director of the vacuum tube cylinders in the Yonkers Division. He lived here alone with one manservant named Jelks. The servant had been awake, had heard a noise downstairs. He came softly down just in time to see a man's figure getting out through a broken window oval.

"Was it this fellow?" Dirk demanded.

Jelks could not say. He had rushed to the window, shouting and firing his flash-gun. He had thought he saw two figures, running in different directions down the hill.

"Well," said Dirk, "maybe this is one and the other got away."

"I never was in here," said our prisoner. "I know nothin' about it."

The uproar had awakened Rance. He had rushed down to find that the little strong-box in his lower corridor had been broken into.

We looked the box over now. It seemed quite a small affair. The lock mechanism was melted away by a hydrogen heat-torch.

"Nothing stolen," said Rance. He smiled lugubriously. "Nothing except my last pay—ten pounds of gold leaf. Everything else seems intact. I seldom keep valuables in here anyway. The bank is the best place for them—serves me correctly for keeping that gold leaf here overnight."

Rance was a tall, wiry man of forty-odd, or perhaps older, with black hair gone prematurely gray. He stood before us in dressing gown and slippers.

"Nothing else stolen—Jelks evidently frightened them off." He eyed our prisoner, who stood sullenly staring at the floor. "Who was with you? What is your name, young man? Why break my strong-box? Did you think I had treasure in it? How did you know that gold leaf was here? And what did you do with it?"

"I didn't break it, I tell you. I got no torch—nothin' like that. I wasn't even in here. You can't nip me for crossin' your hill outside."

The interior of the strong-box was littered with Rance's personal papers strewn around it. Old Jelks was on his knees restoring them to order.

"What are you going to do with this fellow?" Rance asked us. "Do you have to hold him?"

"We'll see what Tarrytown says," Dirk decided. "It's their affair, not mine."

I used Rance's audiphone for connection with the local Tarrytown police commander. We shoved our prisoner before the mirror-grid and turned a light on him; but the Tarrytown chief had never seen him before.

"I'll fly a man right over for him," he told us.

"Will you prosecute him?" I asked Rance, as I disconnected.

The postal official shrugged. "What for? A bundle of gold leaf, which has vanished? Ruining my strong-box, if you can prove that he did it?"

Dirk and I left as soon as the local policeman arrived. The prisoner had all the marks of a professional criminal, but his identity was certainly a secret, for that night at least. The tattooed writing of his signature on his forearm said "John Allen," but under the microscope we could see at once that it was a forgery. And his fingertip traceries were all artificially distorted.

"That got done when I was ten years old," the fellow volunteered. "I was workin' in a laundry an' burned them fingers."

"Well," said Dirk, "it's none of our affair, Jac. Come on."

Rance thanked us for what we had done; the local policeman took John Allen away to hold him on general principles and for investigation of suspected submerged identification.

The dawn was at hand when I lifted the Bat out of Rance's flower-bed and fluttered us back to the viaduct. In fifteen minutes we were lolling into the main north entrance of Great-New York.

"Wonder who that fellow was," I said out of a silence.

"I don't know and I don't care," yawned Dirk. "So far as you and I are concerned, that's the end of it."

But it wasn't. It was only the beginning.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN OF A THOUSAND GUISES.

AT two past noon the next day I had had my sleep out and appeared at the office. Dirk was already before his desk. His mirror-grid was illumined and he was in earnest conversation with our big chief, Harrington, at the Washington headquarters. The image of Harrington's red face showed how earnest he was; but his microscopic voice was submerged by the mufflers so that only Dirk could hear it.

As I entered Dirk was saying, "Of course we'll go after it, Harrington... But please say nothing to Tarrytown—absolute secrecy. Yes, send me the Chameleon's latest type-disk." He laughed. "Well, it won't do us much good to see how the Chameleon looked four years ago, but send it anyway."

What could our Tarrytown affair have to do with the Chameleon? I had never seen this famous criminal, but I knew him well by reputation. For ten years he had terrorized the country with every manner of violence. Upon a dozen proved charges he was indicted; and a score more were laid to him and his under-men. But the under-men were few in number, and elusive. The Chameleon himself was more so. Then at last he was caught and sentenced to the extreme penalty of solitary idleness for life. But within three months he escaped. By some trick of disguise he had walked calmly out of the prison. It was so disgraceful an escape that the chagrined officials had never been willing to explain how it really happened.

That was four years ago, and the Chameleon had never been heard from since—save that every violent crime for which the police could produce no culprit was charged against him.

Dirk snapped me out of my thoughts. He had disconnected from Washington.

"Sit down, Jac. We've got plenty on the schedule now. That little Tarrytown business of early this morning has Washington somewhat heated up. It's about the Chameleon."

"What about him? You're not making out to tell me that was the Chameleon we caught?"

"Don't be witless," Dirk retorted. "The Chameleon is a much taller man. And older. He's a master at submerging identification, but you can't shorten the length of your skeleton—not many inches, anyway. Nor can you lower the blood pressure. Nor soften up brittle arteries. But that fellow we caught is about the next thing to the Chameleon. That's Jimmy Walsh they are holding up there in Tarrytown."

I had not heard of Jimmy Walsh, but Dirk rolled open his desk and laid all the records before me. Walsh had been connected with the Chameleon for several years. He had been the Chameleon's underling in several affairs—but when it came to a court of law, technicalities stopped the proof. Walsh was technically squared with the law now; he had served a short term for forged tattooing and was honorably discharged.

"That's Walsh we caught, certain enough," Dirk went on. "I saw his type half an hour ago—the pictures look just like him and every skeleton measurement is the same."

"What has that to do with us?" I demanded.

Dirk grinned. "Harrington has just

assigned us to the job of capturing the Chameleon. Forty pounds of gold leaf as our personal reward if we happen to do it. Want your quarter share, Jac?"

I did indeed.

BUT there seemed not much to start on. This Jimmy Walsh, his wife Fanny—a girl not yet twenty, but with a six-year criminal record—and Fanny's older brother, one Jake Pratt, were, according to official belief, the Chameleon's closest and most active underlings. Walsh was now held in Tarrytown, but Fanny and Jake Pratt were at liberty.

"Probably all three of them were involved in this morning's burglary," Dirk said. "The girl and Pratt were outside and sent Jimmy in—and the two outside got away. They could have done that; run down the other side of the hill just as we rolled up."

Breaking into the strong-box of a traffic superintendent of the Postal Service! It suggested some activity of the Chameleon. A projected mail robbery? We thought so.

There was indeed, more than a fancied basis for such a belief, which Dirk now disclosed to me. The Tarrytown police had made a thorough search of the Rance grounds shortly after we left. The stolen gold leaf was still missing. But a heat-torch was found, quite evidently the one with which Jimmy Walsh had broken into the strong-box. And with it was a paper which Dirk now spread before me.

"What he did with the gold leaf is a mystery, Jac. But obviously he had no time to connect with his outside companions. And with us chasing him, he hid the torch and this paper—hid them down by the wall in the shrubbery as we were closing in on him."

The folded paper was a diagram crudely drawn in ink—a plan of the intricate arterial system of postal vacuum tubes as they converged at Switch-pit 22, in the Yonkers Division.

"Seems to show a good many of the secret switching combinations," Dirk commented.

"Walsh purloined this from Rance's strong-box?"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

"What does Rance say?"

"He hadn't missed it in the confusion—that litter of papers in his box. It isn't an official document; merely a sketch Rance was making for himself. He's been studying a way of improving the switching facilities in his division. This is just a rough sketch memorandum he had made."

Dirk replaced the diagram in his desk. "Rance has been warned to say nothing of this. No use our theorizing too closely, Jac. The gold leaf may have been what Walsh was really after. Or it may not. To me, it looks like the Chameleon. Something more important than a little routine burglary."

"What are we going to do about it?" I demanded.

"Whatever we do must be absolutely secret," Dirk said. And though our office was insulated against electrical eavesdropping, instinctively he lowered his voice. "I made light of the whole affair. Not a word to any one in Tarrytown that we're on the trail of the Chameleon."

"We're not—yet," I said.

"No, but we will be," Dirk returned. "I've got a premonition, Jac—call it what you like—that this is going to lead us into something. But news travels fast underground. If there's any sign that we're making a move, if any one knows that we're in-

terested in this Jimmy Walsh, the Chameleon will hear of it inevitably and be on his guard."

"What are they doing with Walsh up there?"

"He's locked up awaiting trial for burglarious entry into the home of Robert Rance—which probably won't be proved. And for forged arm-signature, which will doubtless send him to Albany Prison for a year. If we don't pay any attention to Walsh—"

The red incoming message light flashed on Dirk's desk.

"I'll take it, chief." I opened the audiphone.

"Cylinder in mail class AA from Washington for Franklin Dirk now arrived by mail flyer XL at Bennett Field."

"Coming from there by vacuum?"

"Yes. Expected arrival at your office in four minutes. This is advance notification speaking."

"Thanks," I said.

"The type-disk of the Chameleon," said Dirk as I disconnected. "Tell the switch-girl outside that if it's a small enough cylinder have it routed here to our desk."

OUR little vacuum tube terminal opened with a hiss in the specified four minutes and the small copper cylinder tumbled out.

"This type-disk of the Chameleon was made four years ago," Dirk said as he took out the disk. "Here he is—look him over, Jac."

I dimmed the office lights while Dirk put the disk in the projector. The full-length mirror-grid on the wall glowed presently with the life-size moving image of the Chameleon. He stood there in his knitted prison suit, smiling at us sourly. Across his fore-

head the superimposed phosphorescent letters of his name showed for a moment—John Carter. Then his voice came from the magnifier.

"I was born in the State of Ohio thirty-two years ago, and my name is John Carter."

He rolled out the official formula with a queer lisp in his voice. And as I stared, his eyes seemed to meet mine. There was irony in his eyes as though he were telling me that he realized I knew that lisp in his voice did not belong there, but how could I prove it. He stood erect, with arms outstretched in the official attitude. Yet there seemed a strange twist to his shoulders, and he held one of them higher than the other.

"I am not guilty."

He said it with a sudden rasp. The lisp was gone. And as though this were a sardonic jest, his whole figure seemed to shrink. His knees bent; his shoulders hunched, with his head thrust forward, and his body twisted so that he seemed a full two feet shorter. A leering, grinning cripple.

I stared fascinated.

"I am not guilty."

The face was suddenly distorted; every muscle in it trained to abnormal mobility. The jaw was crooked; the cheeks raised so that the twisted mouth was set in a snarl; the tip of the nose was raised; and even the eyeballs seemed protruding as they glared at me.

"I am not guilty."

It ended with a croak of eerie laughter; this grinning, horribly sinister little cripple grimly jesting. And then as the type faded, he slowly straightened, shaking off his pseudo-malformation in a fashion gruesome to watch. There was a dumb blankness of expression on his face as the type-

disk reached its end, and our mirror went dark.

"Well," said Dirk, "that's how he looked four years ago. And that's his character—proud of his ability."

I DREW a long breath. It seemed as though something menacing had been here with us, and I felt unutterable relief that it was gone.

"He should have been an image actor," I said. "With a talent like that—"

"He was, ten years ago. But he found crime more profitable." Dirk put the type-disk in his desk. "I will ask you, Jac: have you any impression now what the Chameleon really looks like?"

"No. For a fact, I haven't."

"Nor has any one else. After that type-disk was taken they began removing the wax from his face-tissues. His jaw-bone, nose-bridge and cheek-bones had been cut down. With the wax gone his thin face looked like a man seventy or eighty."

Dirk smiled at me. "You can't go around melting the cellu-wax out of people's faces and measuring their bones to see if they might be the Chameleon."

But there was one way he could be easily identified. Dirk produced an X-ray photographic print.

"His left leg, Jac. Take a look at this."

In his youth the bullets of an old-fashioned machine gun had smashed away a good portion of the tibia, and a ten-inch segment of the bone had been replaced by a metal plate. The X-ray photograph showed it clearly in the lower front of his left leg.

"He cannot very well falsify that," said Dirk. "And it's conspicuous enough to show on any fluoroscope."

We talked that afternoon until near-

ly dark. There seemed almost nothing upon which we could make a start. But picking up a trail is often like that. You grope by trial and error until you hit something; and then what to do next is generally fairly obvious.

What we did was to go to the grounds of Rance's place secretly that night, equipped with the regulation police electro-magnetic shadow cloaks, and put the diagram of Switch-pit 22 back where it had been found. If Walsh's wife or brother-in-law had been outside while he committed the burglary, we reasoned that they might come back here now and see if he had been able to hide what he had stolen.

But we waited all night, and nothing happened. At dawn, invisible within our cloaks, we slipped away.

And the next night it was the same. Meanwhile Walsh remained in the Tarrytown jail, and no visitor came to him. His wife, her brother, and the Chameleon himself, if they were concerned in this, were certainly wary.

"We'll have to think of something else," said Dirk. "If Fanny Walsh knew where that paper was hidden, she might try coming to get it."

"We can't very well tell her, can we?" I demanded sarcastically.

But Dirk did not smile. "Not very well. Especially since we don't know where she is, and don't dare even show we're interested. But Walsh might tell her if he knew how to do it secretly."

Dirk's plan for our next move was coming to him while he talked.

"See here, Jac, with a clever disguise and you committing some petty crime, I can get you into Walsh's cell as a full-fledged criminal. You'll have to go easy—I imagine he's sharp as a knife blade. But you could show him how to communicate with the outside world, in case he should want to."

The thing as Dirk explained it seemed feasible, and the next day we tried it.

CHAPTER III.

THE HIDDEN MESSAGE.

WALSH stared at me with interest. "What you in here for?"

His keen gaze gave me a momentary quiver. Would he recognize me? But the cell was fairly dim. What Walsh saw was a ragged, disheveled fellow with a day's growth on a pale face, and bloodshot, watery eyes. One of the most useful talents a detective in government service can have is skill at ventriloquism; and I had no fear that he could recognize my voice. The line of my nose-bridge was temporarily heightened, which changes any face to a surprising degree.

"Me?" I said with a snuffle. "What's it of your business? What I told them nippers is all anybody gets out of me."

Whatever friendliness I could get from Walsh I knew must come from him, not me. For a day I was surly and uncommunicative. Suspicious of him, as though he was trying to worm out of me something that he could tell the nippers to help convict me.

He laughed at that, and let me alone. But it is normal to talk when you are shut up together with the law as a common enemy. Gradually I talked, a rambling tale of drug smuggling and peddling and I think I acted with a fair convincingness that a little cocaine now was what I needed to clear my fogged brain. Walsh also talked a little—lies probably, for I was always conscious that a move from me would have sprung him into wariness.

Then Dirk, with his tall slim figure bent nearly double and a hump on his shoulder, came to visit me. The precaution screen of fine wire mesh was kept between us; but we were allowed to whisper together, with a guard watching. Walsh sat uninterested in the cell corner.

Then Dirk left, and our guard with him.

"My partner," I told Walsh. "Did you see the hump on them shoulders?" I laughed. "He can fool any of these nippers with that hunchback look. He's Ollie Greenberg! What they wouldn't give to know that, eh?"

Which meant nothing to Walsh. But it was a confidence from me, and perhaps it had its effect.

"Nobody comes to see you?" I suggested.

"No."

"What, they don't know you're here? Or maybe you got no friends?"

"Maybe."

"For me, if'n I had a girl—which ain't so—I'd send for her."

It seemed to me that he started. But at my earnest, naïve look he laughed.

"Write her a letter," he said sarcastically, "so the nippers can read it?"

I leaned down over him. "Got a better way than that. I was in wunst, had a forty-pound platinum ingot tucked away in a dump on Staten Island. My partner—this Ollie Greenberg—he was watched so he couldn't get near it. But we got another guy to go—passed him the word secretly."

I could see that Walsh was interested; I hoped he was thinking of his wife Fanny and that diagram which he had hidden on the Rance grounds.

But he only grinned with further sarcasm. "What you do? Write a letter in invisible ink, maybe? Of course the nippers never heard of that!"

"Better'n that. I was locked up. Ollie couldn't be seen talking to the guy who was going after the platinum, and we was in a hurry, so we paged him on the public news-mirrors. Simple, eh? So simple and easy that it worked."

I was trying to persuade Walsh to let Dirk, in the guise of Ollie Greenberg, page Fanny and give her a message.

Walsh said abruptly: "If I had a friend he wouldn't answer no public pagin'. He'd naturally think it was some trick."

We knew this was so with Fanny, for since I had been locked up here Dirk had tried a public personal page-call for "Fanny Walsh." No one had responded. With the hundreds of bulletin mirrors in the metropolitan area she might have seen it and stepped into the nearest cubby to be connected with whoever wanted to talk to her, but she did not.

"No," I told Walsh now. "Nobody with brains would be fooled. But we paged this here friend of ours with a fancy name. Clever, eh? It was a name nobody but us ever called him. See the idea?" I waited to let it sink in. "When he seen it on the page-board he knew it had to be a message from me."

Blank silence was all I got from Walsh, and I dropped it. But the next day when Dirk arrived to visit me again, Walsh suddenly came to life.

"Listen," he whispered. "How about this Greenberg fellow takin' a message out for me?"

My heart leaped. We had it at last.

"I guess he will. A page call?"

"Yeah." He stared into my eyes.

"Can we trust him?"

"What's to trust? You ain't going to tell Greenberg where a big bar of platinum is? I wouldn't trust—"

"Heck, no. Listen, you tell him this: 'Page Kitten Claws.' That's a girl, see? She'll know that's from me. If she comes on the audiphone just let Greenberg tell her Jimmy says, 'Paper by the wall in a hurry.'"

We had it! Within two hours the jail commander yanked me out of that cell, and so far as Walsh was concerned, that was the end of me.

"YOU think she'll answer it?" Dirk demanded.

"Walsh seemed to think so. Nothing to do but wait, is there, chief?"

It was about midnight. We sat in our office in the mid-Manhattan area, waiting to see if any audiphone connections would be made with "Kitten Claws." Over all the great metropolitan district, wherever there was a public name-mirror—at corridor corners of every pedestrian level, at the terminals of all the escalators and lifts, and at vantage points to be viewed by all the passing traffic—under the segment C, the name "Kitten Claws" was glowing for a few seconds at intervals of less than a minute.

It had been there for two hours now without result. One of the mirrors was visible from our office. Through the window oval, across a spider balcony we could see the ten-foot glowing grid set against the opposite wall of the arcade close under the city roof. The roster of names was constantly changing: there chanced now to be only a few under C. "Caw, William." "Celgrade, Frances." "Claws, Kitten."

It winked at me silently. Vanished, then came again. Would she see it somewhere? Would she chance answering it?

My heart leaped as our audiphone call sounded. Dirk was upon it with

me at his elbow. He gave audible connection, but not the visible.

I heard the microscopic incoming voice:

"Central Paging Service."

It was our quarry!

"Registered as wanting Kitten Claws," Dirk briefly responded.

The connection clicked. A low contralto voice said:

"I am Kitten Claws. Who wants me?"

She did not give us the visible contact. Was this Fanny Walsh? Neither of us were familiar with her voice and we could not tell.

Dirk said quickly; "I am a friend—you would not know me, but I am Ollie Greenberg. I got a message from Jimmy. To-day I seen him in Tarrytown."

The voice said, "Jimmy who? I don't know any Jimmy."

"Anyway, I give it," Dirk insisted. "Jimmy says, 'Paper by the wall in a hurry.'"

She repeated, "Paper by the wall in a hurry. Is that all?"

"Yes. From Jimmy; you should understand."

The audiphone clicked and went dead. She had disconnected and hurried away.

Dirk hissed for the wave sorter.

"That call I just had from Central Paging Service—what was the location of the talker?"

"One minute, please."

"I can't give you a minute," Dirk protested. "You ought to have the information ready for me—I registered an advance request for it."

"One minute, please."

"Give me Sorter A-4060," Dirk demanded. "Do it quickly."

A-4060 presently gave us the location. "Kitten Claws" had spoken

from a cubby in a distant section of the Brooklyn district.

"Thank you," said Dirk. "Get our paraphernalia together, Jac. Let's start away."

IT seemed reasonable to assume that Dirk had just been talking to the wife of Jimmy Walsh. She had been, presumably, on the Rance grounds that night of the burglary. She would remember the stone wall; and now she knew that Jimmy had purloined the paper they were after and hidden it by the wall. She would, we both felt, make an effort now to secure that diagram.

"In a hurry," I said. "Walsh added that to his message. Why—"

"Because," said Dirk, "after these several days which have passed, it's perfectly possible that the scheme, whatever it is, matures to-night. The Chameleon wants that diagram to-night! Fanny will go get it—in a hurry, as Jimmy advised. When I gave her the message just now, she repeated it after me. 'Paper by the wall, *in a hurry.*' Jac, she quite unconsciously stressed those last three words. She'll get there as quickly as she can. She's way off in Brooklyn, but just the same we'd better snap after it if we expect to get there first."

We had our equipment ready in a moment. The Bat was housed on a take-off platform of the city roof almost directly above us. We went up in the lift, caught an escalator niche and were at the platform in three or four minutes.

We were equipped now with the electro-magnetic police shadow cloaks, our flash-guns, microphonic eavesdropping ear-grids and similar devices; and I carried a small fluoroscope for the making of X-ray images out to a range

of some fifty or sixty feet. If Fanny came and secured the diagram we hoped to follow her to the Chameleon.

Once on the city roof we found that the night was clear—an almost cloudless starry sky, with no moon. Starting this way openly from our office, it was possible that we would be followed.

"We take no chances of that," Dirk said as we climbed into the Bat. "Have to risk losing a little time and make sure we shake off anybody who's after us."

The traffic starter appeared to clear our send-off.

"Destination Martinique," Dirk told him. "What level can we use to-night?"

"Tail-wind at eighteen thousand," he informed us. "But that fool insect of yours is too small. You'll be annoying to the checkers, coming down for fuel so much."

"That's not for you to worry over," Dirk retorted.

We lifted into the starlight and took the south through lane at eighteen thousand feet. The big craft went by us, as though we were standing still. We had only gone a few miles when Dirk put out our lights.

"We'll take a chance on not getting caught at this, eh, Jac?"

We went up as high as the Bat would safely climb, made off to the west, and then dropped. If any one had any ideas of checking our route, we had probably shaken them off.

It was about 1 A.M. when we got the Bat safely hidden on a dark side road less than a mile from the Rance place. And in ten minutes more, enveloped in our shadow cloaks, we were crouching in the darkness of the thick shrubbery by the stone wall near where the diagram was hidden.

The paper was still there. We turned over the stone under which it was hidden so that the place would be more obvious. Had Fanny come, failed to find it, and gone? We did not think so.

The Rance house was dark and silent. There seemed no one but ourselves prowling the grounds. An occasional aëro passed overhead; and a few vehicles rolled by on the near-by viaduct.

FOR perhaps thirty minutes we crouched within our cloaks. The current was silently throbbing through the magnetized fabric. Hoods covered our faces; our hands were black-gloved. At a distance even as close as a few feet light rays striking us would be bent around the aura of the magnetic field created by the cloak current, so that to the eye of the beholder, the background behind us would be visible. Thus, to that beholder we could not be seen. It was far from perfect invisibility, but it served upon all ordinary occasions and here in the starlight we had no fear of detection save that we might make some sound.

Half an hour. Then three-quarters. Were all our calculations wrong? Would no one come in answer to the lure?

Dirk abruptly gripped me. "Look there!"

From down by the viaduct base the figure of a woman with flowing braided hair briefly showed in the starlight as she moved along the edge of the Rance grounds, coming toward us.

"Fanny!" I whispered.

"Yes. Probably."

Then suddenly, from the shadow of a tree farther up the hill, we saw a man's figure lurking. Some one else

upon the silent scene. Some one watching, not us, but the oncoming woman.

Dirk's gloved hand touched me. "A man up there. See him? And look down by the viaduct!"

Fanny, if it were she, was not alone. A small winged car rolled up the viaduct and stopped fairly near us. A man's figure climbed from it. Evidently this was the car in which the woman had arrived. The man called softly, and the woman momentarily stopped and turned back.

We were too far away to distinguish the words, but in a moment I had my microphonic eavesdropper connected. The woman and man met at the foot of the Rance grounds. I caught in and heard their greeting.

"Fanny, wait! I'll go with yer."

"You better stay with the car."

"It's all right if we hurry."

"Listen, Jake, don't let's take any chance. Jimmy thought I better do the lookin'. If he'd thought you, he'd have said so."

"To the devil with that."

They headed together for the foot of the wall, leaving their aëro on the viaduct. Fanny, and her brother Jake Pratt! They had not seen the lurking figure up the hill. That figure was still there, shielding himself behind a tree. Who was he?

Dirk whispered, "I don't want to capture Fanny and Jake. Let them get the paper and follow them. We can board their car, hidden in the tail."

They were still two hundred feet from us, coming toward the lower end of the wall, evidently intending to search along it up the hill. We had scuffed up the ground and made the hiding place of the diagram fairly obvious. They would find it. Everything was going as we planned it ought

to go, save for this third watching figure. Who was he?

DIRK suddenly whispered, "Jac, creep up on that fellow up there."

When you get within fifty feet, shoot the fluoroscope. Just a chance—"

The Chameleon? Could it be? The thought gave me a shock. I had supposed he and Walsh were allies.

Dirk was pushing at me. "Get the X-ray of him. And then get up on the viaduct. I'll meet you there."

I started away boldly through an open patch of starlight, since I was invisible and need only avoid moving the shrubbery, or making a noise. The man up the hill was still standing motionless behind the tree-trunk, but from the angle I was approaching I could see him plainly. I got within two hundred feet. Then one hundred. Behind me Fanny and Jake, undoubtedly unaware that they were observed, had reached the wall and were poking along it.

I had the fluoroscope ready. Seventy feet—still I was a little out of range. The man behind the tree abruptly broke cover and began moving up the hill directly away from me! Had he become aware of my approach? I did not think so. He moved furtively, as though to avoid Fanny and Jake seeing him, but not with undue haste.

I increased my pace. But I came to a line of shrubbery; I had to force through it with caution. The man up the hill gained on me; I lost sight of him once or twice. Then I saw that he was running. And from the point I had now reached a small aëro-car with extended wings was disclosed half hidden by a clump of trees. My quarry ran and leaped into it.

I abandoned all caution. But I was too far away; I had been taken by sur-

prise. I checked my run. I stood, baffled and chagrined while the car with its lone occupant swiftly and silently rose, sailed over me and was gone into the starlight.

I recovered my wits to see that down the hill Fanny and Jake were standing near where we had hidden the paper. They, too, were staring at the disappearing aëro. And then they began a sudden retreat for the viaduct. Dirk was close to them, no doubt. Panic swept me. They would board their car and be gone before I could reach it.

I lunged down the hill at a run. But for all my haste I was too late. Fanny and her brother reached their car. I climbed frantically to the viaduct, but I was a hundred yards down it. The aëro came rolling at me, and the best that I could do was leap aside to avoid being struck. It went past at forty miles or so an hour—too fast for me to dare attempt to board it. I stood flattened against the viaduct parapet. I saw Fanny and Jake seated together in the forward riding pit. The tail-space seemed empty. Was Dirk, shrouded in his invisible cloak, crouching there?

The car lifted as soon as it had passed me. It sailed up from the viaduct, into the starlight, following the direction of the other aëro, which, with its single man occupant, had eluded me on the hill and winged away only a few moments before.

For a minute I stood alone on the viaduct, wondering if Dirk would make his presence known. The Rance house up the hill was still dark and silent. These activities seemed not to have aroused its inmates. I could think of no reason for fearing visibility. I snapped off the current in my cloak, and doffed the hood. Dirk, if he were around here anywhere, would see me now on the viaduct, standing by the

parapet rail. The night was still starlit, though now, off by the northern horizon, I noticed a rising bank of black clouds, suggesting a coming thunderstorm.

I stood revealed at the parapet for a moment, but no signal came from Dirk. Then a thought struck me. If he were riding the tail of Fanny's car, he would have realized, just as they were starting, that I was too far up the hill to reach them in time. I moved now along the viaduct to the place where the car had been resting. And there on the pavement was Dirk's message to me—a little crumpled sheet of paper with words he had had time to scribble and drop for me to find.

JAC: s

I am with them. Going to Switch-pit 22 Yonkers—now! Take our Bat and come quickly.

DIRK.

The Bat was nearly a mile away, hidden on a side road. I raised my hood, switched the current into my cloak and went off at a steady jogging run. I found the Bat lying unmolested. But ten minutes or more had passed. Could I get down into the sub-basement of the great city and to the switch-pit in time to help Dirk?

I lifted the Bat from its hiding place and soared aloft, heading southward for the Yonkers district.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED IN A PLANE.

AS Dirk afterward agreed, we had miscalculated our actions there by the stone wall of the Rance place. When once I left Dirk and started up the hill, there was no way that he could recall me. For a few

moments he lay quiet, watching the oncoming Fanny and her brother. They advanced, seeming quite unaware that any one else was there. From Dirk's angle he could see the figure up by the tree, though they could not.

Fanny and Jake reached the foot of the wall and began searching the ground along its base, moving now directly toward where Dirk was crouching. Presently, with his unaided ears, their low voices were audible. They saw the patch of ground where we had scuffed it, and the overturned stone; and they pounced upon the diagram.

There was a moment when Dirk was wholly absorbed watching Fanny and Jake. They were no more than ten feet from him; he could see and hear them plainly. Jake flashed a little hand torch upon the paper eagerly.

"This is it, Fan!"

"What's it say?"

"Plan of Switch-pit 22, Yonkers. That was the one, wasn't it? That dirty rat, pushin' us down to ten per cent. This'll fix him."

He pored over the paper, but Fanny reached for it.

"Give me," she demanded.

"Leave it alone."

"Jimmy said 'in a hurry.' Maybe that might mean to-night. Ain't it in the code there somewhere? The time an' the cylinder. He said—"

"I'm lookin'. But it—"

"Give me," the woman repeated.

"I got it. That dirty rat, this'll fix him."

"To the devil with that, Jake! What time, an' what cylinder number?"

"It's cylinder P-288, leavin' the North-Central Depot at 3.50 A.M. That gets it to Switch-pit 22 at about 3.56. An' it's to-night! Fan, it's less'n an

hour from now. Quick as we can get there—I'll be damned! Look up there, Fan!"

They both turned to gaze up the hill, and Dirk turned with them. The man I was chasing was visible as he ran into the open, disappeared into a hollow and a moment later up came his aëro, sailing away to the southward. It astonished Fanny and Jake, and alarmed them. That they knew or guessed who the man was and where he was going was at once apparent to Dirk.

Fanny muttered vehemently: "That's him! I bet that's him! Going to the pit now."

They were passing Dirk, hurrying back to the viaduct.

"Jake, what'll we do?"

"Go there! I'm goin' through with this myself, just like Jimmy planned—the heck with ten per cent. I can handle him. I'll drive a flash through him if he don't like it. You, Fan, you're as good as a man in a fight."

"But, Jake, no killing. You know what—"

They were running now, with Dirk after them. Fanny, in her divided skirt wound tight with leather straps around her legs from the knees down, scaled the viaduct braces like a cat going up a tree. They reached the car and were a moment starting it, during which Dirk was able to climb into the tail-space and scribble me the note. And then they rolled down the viaduct and sailed.

DIRK did not know what had happened to me, but he very well guessed. He lay crouched in the little rectangle of space over the tail. The two in the driving pit were only twelve or fifteen feet in advance of him. The pit-lights were out, save for

the opalescent glow of the dial-faces. Dirk could see the two figures fairly plainly; Jake was driving, with Fanny wedged beside him. He had handed her the diagram. She folded it away into the pocket of her dark linen-corded jacket; and then sat calmly coiling the braids of her black hair upon her head. And in a moment, when she had finished, Dirk saw a flash-gun ready in her hand.

Behind Dirk, back over the northern horizon, a storm was coming up. There was presently a distant flash of lightning, and a muffled muttering thunder. The two in the driving pit occasionally spoke, but the thrum of the motors made their voices inaudible.

From his position Dirk could see over the side of the tail, and down to the Hudson River shining in the starlight. They were at some ten thousand feet; it was a ribbon of river, edged by the great docks and the spider aëro platforms, banked with beacon lights. And close ahead now were the rising ramparts of Great-New York. A hundred entrances were here as a choice, but no matter which one Jake selected, it was only a matter of minutes now down into the city to the Yonkers district and Switch-pit 22.

Dirk was trying to map out a course of action. He was, perhaps, for a moment inexcusably careless. He was aware of the distant lightning flashes behind him; and suddenly he awoke to what had so unexpectedly occurred. Fanny and Jake had murmured together. They abruptly flung up the aëro's cross-wind vizor. It rose like a curtain between Dirk and them.

Dirk had hardly time to move from his wedged and crouching position, with his current-charged invisible cloak enveloping him and a flash-gun in his gloved hand. He was aware of a sud-

den dip of the aëro, a half loop-roll, and all the heavens and the outskirts of the metal city beneath swooped as the car rolled and then righted itself.

Beyond a corner of the raised vizor-shield, Dirk saw that Fanny and Jake had jumped for the little safety volplane board which hung clipped under the right forward wing. It flashed to Dirk then what had happened. The lightning flares as a background had made him briefly visible. They had discovered him; feared to chance an exchange of shots at such close range; and they were abandoning the aëro, sending it wrecked to crash with Dirk upon the city ramparts.

It all happened so quickly that Dirk had no more than time to climb unsteadily to his feet. The aëro controls were smashed. The car dived wildly.

Jake cut away the volplane. With its solid little cross-wing spread, it sailed off at a tangent like a soaring bird, with Fanny and Jake crouching in its center. As they left, the girl's arm flung up. A white bundle hurled from her hand, struck Dirk and fell into the tail-pit beside him.

A fabric balloon crescent! This Fanny, whatever her brother's motives, did not herself want Dirk to die. She had flung him the rolled fabric which in the absence of a volplane had saved many a pilot's life. Dirk had no more than time to unroll it and fasten its harness upon his shoulders.

He leaped free of the car into the dizzy whirling mingled earth and sky. Dropped, then was caught as the fabric-crescent opened above him. The car went rolling past him like a broken bird. Far away over the river, he saw the dot of the volplane board as Fanny and Jake maneuvered it to safety upon a mid-level causeway of the Yonkers city entrance.

There was a brief moment when Dirk was conscious that he was falling too swiftly. The crescent fabric above him, never inspected by Jake and perhaps inexpertly rolled into that bundle years before, was still half spilled of its air. Dirk jerked desperately to right it, but could not. He was aware of a great spider platform—the headway of an escalator—rushing up to meet him. Uprushing lights—

There was a tearing, crashing impact. All the world went dark.

HE recovered to find himself lying on the metal grid of the pavement. A ring of curious pedestrians were around him; and a pedestrian-traffic officer was kneeling, applying restoratives.

"I'm all right," Dirk protested weakly. "Get me up. I'm not hurt."

He wondered how much time had passed. Was it too late now for him to get to Switch-pit 22?

"We seen the chute comin' down," said the officer. "Aëro-chute with nothin' hangin' from it."

"I had on an electric cloak, you see," Dirk smiled weakly. "But the crash made me visible, didn't it?"

"Yes. Stand up. Can't you stand? What's the matter with your leg?"

Dirk had thought he was not greatly injured, but now when he tried to stand his left leg gave way.

He clung to the traffic man. "It may be broken, officer. Or the knee twisted. What time is it?"

"Tri-night plus eighteen. Who are you? Were you in that plane?"

Three eighteen A.M. Dirk realized he had been unconscious only a moment or two. A street emergency light suddenly flashed on, bathing them in its actinic glare. And Dirk saw that a near-by metal pole held an American

Press News lens. It was illumined. This scene was already flashing throughout the city on the news-mirrors.

"Officer, I'm Dirk, on government criminal investigation service." He fumbled with a secret recess of his jacket and produced his identification check. "Get that lens turned off. I'm in the midst of a case. I don't want—"

A newsgatherer came shoving his way through the ring of staring pedestrians, and held a microphone aloft.

"Get away with that," roared the traffic man. "This is private." He added, "I'll blank that lens." With his flash-gun he shot a bolt through its wires. The lens-eye went dark.

"Thanks," said Dirk. "Officer, I can't walk. But I've got to get to the North-Central Depot of the Postal Cylinder Tubes before three fifty. It isn't far, is it?"

"Quite a ways. I'm takin' yer." The burly officer raised Dirk in his arms. "This post here can get along without me... Here, you, stop that cage! We're going down in a rush."

The newsgatherer halted a down-dropping elevator cage. Dirk was carried into it. They dropped swiftly through all the levels into the city sub-basement where they boarded a single-seated car of the underground monorail and were routed in a rush directly for the Postal Service North-Central Depot.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE MAIL PASSAGES.

MEANWHILE, knowing nothing of all this that had happened to

Dirk, I landed the Bat on one of the approach platforms of the Yonkers entrance causeway and rolled into the

city. The current was off in my cloak now; I had no wish to startle traffic directors by showing them an apparently driverless car. I found presently a place to leave the Bat, on an upper balcony level of Park 80 in the Yonkers district.

A cage took me into the sub-basement. At this hour just before dawn, the subterranean corridors were almost deserted. There were practically no pedestrians; an occasional passing monorail and a few freight-laden vehicles on the central drive-space. These lower shops were all closed now, their glassite windows dark and barricaded.

I moved along the corridor with my cloak over my arm. The time was 3.40 A.M. I was within close walking distance now of Switch-pit 22. I thought that Fanny and Jake, and Dirk a shadow with them, certainly would have reached there by now.

I stepped into an arcade recess which was dark and secluded, away from the dim blue glow of the corridor tube-lights; and with the current in my cloak again making me invisible, I hastened back into the corridor.

One may travel swiftly within an invisible cloak and with a feeling of comparative safety. The extraordinary penalties attached to the use of these police cloaks have made criminals wary of them, and few indeed have fallen into their hands before the rightful wearer could short-circuit them, burning out the intricate wiring. There was little chance that I would encounter and collide with any one else so equipped. I ran freely down the vaulted lane, and the city noises blotted out my footfalls. I slipped into a monorail car whose lights signified it would stop near my destination—and its few passengers were not aware of me.

At 3.48 I was down in the city's

lowest cellar level. The great cellar caverns stretched around me, with yellow spots of light eerie in the gloom. The fetid air—for all the city's boasted ventilating system—was so heavy down here that I could see it hanging in layers. Dripping moisture, despite the modern devices which should keep it clear, hung in glistening beads on the low vaulted roof. The drainage pipes and conduits lay on the wet floor like tangled pythons . . . I saw occasionally groups of repair workers, ghouls prowling in the gloom. Overhead, the transit tunnels were rumbling with trains; and off to the right the Hudson River bed, I knew, was still higher.

I think that it was just about 3.50 A.M. when I plunged into one of the winding little tunnels designated as a lower entrance to Postal Switch-pit 22. And in a moment more the interior of the pit lay before me.

I stood for a time cautiously pressed against the tunnel wall, peering down into the pit whose floor lay a few feet beneath my level. This was one of the smaller of the many converging centers of the arterial system of inter-city postal transportation. Fifty perhaps of the vacuum transit tubes—each tube some three feet in diameter—converged here. The pit was a low-vaulted circular room some sixty feet in diameter, shaped like the interior of two shallow bowls, one inverted upon the other. There was thus a concave floor and a concave ceiling, with a circular mid-line where they connected.

THE pit, as I saw it now, was dimly blue lit. The banks of tube entrances, each capped by its heavy metal shield; stood like staring dark eyes. In the pit center, upon

universal joints, were the four electro-magnetic cranes, which, with uncanny precision, seized upon the arriving cylinders as they slid out of their portes, lifted them, swung them dangling across the room and inserted them in the proper departing tubes for their new destination. The great location board, covered with tiny winking lights showing the location of the on-coming cylinders, stood in a crescent to one side. And near it were the banks of switches and key-levers by which the cranes and the tube-portes were controlled.

There were, I knew, times during the twenty-four hours when traffic here demanded the presence of several switchmen. But I had anticipated only one or two would be in the pit at this hour. And Fanny and Jake and Dirk—

I saw, with my first quick glance, that two men were here. One of them—the switchman, evidently the only one on duty—stood now at his key-levers. He was operating only one crane and the cylinders were arriving fairly fast for him. One lay waiting in its cradle on the floor—glistening bronze like a huge double-pointed cigar, a little less than three feet in diameter at its bulging middle and nearly ten feet long. Another porte popped open and vomited its cylinder, and the crane lifted the first one and swung it away.

Traffic was proceeding normally. This switchman on duty now I had never seen before; but the man standing beside him I recognized at once. It was Rance, superintendent of this division, in charge of this and several others of the Yonkers pits—Rance, from whom a few night ago Jimmy Walsh had stolen the diagram and, presumably, ten pounds of Rance's

personal gold-leaf funds which had never been heard of since.

Thoughts are insistent things. I had been standing in the little entrance way no more than a few seconds. I recall that it flashed to me that Jake and Fanny and Dirk had not yet arrived. Rance, of course, knew of some treasure-cylinder which was traversing the mails at this hour. He knew its number, and that it was to leave the North-Central Depot at 3.50 A.M., arriving here about 3.56. And since his code paper had disappeared he was personally here now to make sure that the cylinder was properly handled.

With extra guards? I saw, under the electric clock dial, the switchman's routine weapon. And then I saw that Rance and his switchman were not alone here. Two other dark-garbed figures crouched behind the location-board. Hiding there, weapons in hand.

I think I had been about to switch off my cloak current and enter the pit, to join Rance and warn him of the menace from Jake and Fanny. But the surprise of seeing the two crouching figures stopped me. I had at first a vague swift idea that they were menacing Rance and the switchman, but instantly I realized that was not so. Rance could easily see them from where he was standing.

But their furtive, tense aspect gave me pause. And over the clank of the crane and the cylinders, the hiss of the vacuums, I still could hear the voices of Rance and his subordinate. What they were saying gave me greater pause; a wonderment; a feeling that what I was seeing here in the pit was not what it seemed to be.

"Three fifty-three," said Rance. He gestured to the clock. "It should have left the North-Central Depot three minutes ago. It'll start presently." He

was gazing at the location-board. "A little late, evidently . . . Keep up with the traffic, Dowling. Don't let 'em collect on you. We don't want the down town inspectors looking our way. Not at this critical moment."

IT sounded queer to me. The words, or the way he said them. It gave me pause. I stepped down to the floor of the pit, but I shrank against its wall, crouched under a safety rail, invisible within my cloak.

Dowling was busy endeavoring to clear the floor of three cylinders before others arrived. Rance, with his tall muscular figure garbed in tight leather trousers and a gray suède jacket, was no more than twenty feet from me. His stern-featured face, with the iron-gray hair above it, was plain in the glow of a ceiling light. He was grimly, sardonically smiling. He added:

"Damned traitors, eh, Dowling? Well, if they dare come here we'll give them a surprise." His glance went to the two crouching figures.

What did that mean? He would not be talking along that line, it seemed to me, unless the lens-eye and the microphone over the location-board—by which headquarters down town could see and listen to what was transpiring here—had been cut off. It gave me a shivery feeling to know that we were entirely isolated from the rest of the world.

In a little arcade opening across the pit a figure suddenly appeared. Jake Pratt. He stood with leveled flash-gun.

"Don't move," he growled at Rance. "You—by the devil, I'll flash you dead if you make a move!"

His weapon was upon Rance. Behind him I saw the determined Fanny standing calm as a man with her gun

pointing over Jake's shoulder as he crouched in advance of her.

Rance whirled around. "Oh, so it's you!"

"Put your hands out!"

"They're out and up!" Rance's arms went over his head. "Don't be a fool—don't flash me, Jake."

Fanny's voice shrilled: "You, Dowling, keep away from your gun! An' keep that traffic moving. We don't want any attention brought here at this time."

Jake leaped into the pit, with Fanny after him. But where was Dirk? I expected him to take a part in the scene.

Rance stood motionless, with his arms above his head. "What's the matter with you, Jake? You, Fanny, what's all this play-acting for? We're isolated from down town—don't worry. I'm not taking any chances. That cylinder's coming."

"Damn right!" growled Jake. "Comin', an' what's in it comes to me. You with your damn' ten per cent—"

"So that's your game, is it?"

"Yes—that's our game!" Fanny had snatched the flash-gun from under the clock. Dowling, narrowly watching, went on with his traffic work.

"An' you're a damn' killer," Fanny put in. "Back him over against the wall, Jake. Get him out of the way. Dowling, you—"

She never finished. It seemed that Rance gave some slight signal. From behind the location-board came the hiss of a shot. It caught Jake, drilled him. His own bolt went wild as he flung his arms up and tumbled forward upon his face. A bolt leaped at Fanny, missed her; and instead of firing, she stood for an instant numb with surprise. Then she threw down her weapon. And she flung herself to the floor upon her

brother's body, gathering his head in her arms.

"Jake, you're not killed? Jake, speak to me! Oh, Jake! Brother Jake, don't die!"

ALL this had happened in less than a minute. I still crouched, invisible, across the room. The cylinder was coming! Dowling momentarily left his traffic and pounced upon the location-board to verify it.

"There she comes! Five minutes late, but she's coming!"

Rance and his two followers ignored the body of Jake and the sobbing Fanny.

"Get ready, lads. We'll have to work fast... Dowling, don't let us get cluttered up. Get rid of those cylinders."

Where was Dirk? I felt suddenly that everything was up to me. But what could I do? A flash from my gun would kill one of these men, but there were four of them. They would end me in a second once I was discovered.

I became aware that I was clutching my little fluoroscope. Almost without conscious thought my finger pressed its lever. The nearly invisible beam swept the switch-pit. It fell upon the figure of Rance. I made it cling to his legs. And as the bones became visible, I saw the familiar break and the little metal plate.

He was the Chameleon!

I had anticipated for those few seconds that Rance must be the Chameleon. But for my life, had I given it sober thought, I would not have flashed on that fluoroscope. Its faint beam in this pit of shifting lights went unnoticed. But the grid in my gloved hand was not invisible. And one of Rance's men saw it.

A bolt came suddenly at me. But upon the wrong side, for it very narrowly missed me, hissed against the metal wall and the shock of its electron-aura numbing all my senses. I recall that I tried to straighten. My senses were whirling; paralyzed nerves made my fingers drop the flash-gun. I took a staggering step upon bending, trembling legs.

And I heard the Chameleon's voice:

"There he is! Grab him!"

The shock of the bolt had disorganized my cloak mechanism. I was visible! The men came leaping upon me and bore me down.

"SO it's the little nipper, is it?"

I remained dimly conscious; temporarily paralyzed. The Chameleon stood bending over me. He recognized me from that morning at dawn when with Dirk I had captured Jimmy Walsh.

"The little nipper! Still looking for that ten pounds of gold leaf I said that Walsh stole from me? Is that it? Or are you after bigger things? Where's your partner?"

Where indeed? In all the chaos of my confused senses, I could only think of that. Where was Dirk? Would he blunder into this, even as I had blundered?

One of the men kicked at me. "What 'll I do with him, chief? Dead men don't talk. We don't want any live bodies left here when we get out of this. And that damn' woman; two little flashes, now—"

Fanny's voice came drab, half hysterical from where she huddled over the body of her brother.

"That's it! Go on an' drill us both. You, the killer—"

To my fading senses it was all like a distant drama in which I had no part.

Movement of grotesque shadows, and voices.

Dowling's voice: "She's coming. Two minutes! Less, maybe, she'll be here."

"Let 'em alone," growled Rance. "Dowling, hold out the next cylinder. We'll put these bodies in it—dead and alive both, why not? And send 'em off."

"And have this nipper tell all about it?" some one protested. "And the damn' woman?"

"The devil," chuckled Rance. "Dowling can wreck them off somewhere in the tube. A little postal traffic accident with dead bodies that won't tell a thing."

I felt myself being rolled aside. The treasure cylinder would be here in a minute.

The voices echoed all around me. I understood it all now. The Chameleon had made his diagram for the information of Walsh and the other men, who were to hold up the "innocent" Director Rance, alibiing him; but he had withheld it from Walsh, Jake and Fanny, deciding to risk doing the holdup himself, when there came an argument over the division of the spoils.

Dowling's voice again: "She'll be here in thirty seconds, boys. Passin' the last light now."

A treasure cylinder, such as very often passes through the mails. It had gold leaf, platinum dust, and negotiable securities in its bags. It was to be diverted now—switched wrongly—to a wrong destination, where in an outlying district other under-men of the Chameleon were waiting to seize its contents and make off in a bandit freight-aëro.

Twenty seconds. The call buzzer from down town Postal Headquarters

was vehemently ringing. Rance leaped to it.

"Yes, this is Rance. Yes, everything is all right. Dowling on duty. I'm here with him... Yes, some trouble with the image lens and microphone—that's why we're isolated... Yes, send a repair man—"

He cut off. "Repair man! They'd better send a crew to take our places!"

Dowling's voice: "Here she comes!"

Across the pit a vacuum porte hissed open. The ten-foot treasure cylinder slid out under the crane.

The Chameleon leaped for it, and called triumphantly: "The label's right! This is it! Lift it, Dowling! Tube 1820 for North Jersey division. Get it away!"

I had a brief glimpse of the sleek glistening bronze cylinder as the crane magnet descended upon it. A man was holding Fanny and me; but the Chameleon and the other man were crowding upon the cylinder. Dowling, across the pit at his levers, swung the crane arm down.

Then abruptly the side of the cylinder slid open! There was an instant when I was aware of a peering face from within the cylinder, gauging the scene here in the pit. The Chameleon and his companion were caught wholly by surprise. They leaped backward and leveled their weapons. But too late! From the cylinder came a flash. Then another.

The Chameleon and the man with him toppled and fell as the bolts struck them. The man holding me jumped to his feet, met a flash and fell back inert upon me. Dowling tried to run, but a bolt caught him.

It was over—a second or two of horror. The pit cleared of its gases and flying sparks. Four men of the city police came climbing from the cylinder.

der. The head and shoulders of Dirk showed as he braced himself against its sides.

"Rather too bad to kill instead of capturing them," Dirk was saying. "But you can't risk exchanging bolts in a place like this. And, Jac, when I fell from that aëro, the quickest and surest way I could get help was to be rushed to the North-Central Postal Depot. We intercepted the cylinder—got the treasure out of it and got ourselves in it." He smiled grimly. "That was one sure way to get here without giving warning."

Fanny was still huddled by the body of her brother. Dirk, upon his injured leg, hobbled over to her.

"Fanny, I have you to thank for throwing me that chute. You don't like killing people, do you?"

She gazed up at him dully. "They killed my brother."

"Yes."

He bent and touched her glossy black hair. "I'm going to get you the lightest sentence I can," he said gently. "When you and Jimmy are freed, why don't you try living straight for a while?" I have never seen Dirk's face so gentle. "It's a lot simpler and safer, Fanny. And I think it's more your style."

But she did not answer; she just sat holding her dead brother's body in her arms.

THE END.



The First Navy Journal

TO-DAY practically every ship in the United States Navy distributes or posts the news as received by radio. There are also several journals devoted to the Navy's interests, but back in 1894 the U. S. S. New York began the publication of the first sailor paper ever printed aboard ship.

It took the form of a weekly called *The Wave* and was issued with six pages of reading matter printed on book paper. There were six men on the paper's staff, known respectively as editor, foreign correspondent, out-of-town reporter, and the spar, berth, and gun deck reporters. Deck hands and the men of the engineers' force were the contributors, and all articles were carefully kept from the eyes of officers until published.

The first page bore the paper's title in big red letters. Under it was printed "Published in the interest of men-of-war's men the world over," and then "Registered at the P. O. of Neptunus Rex. Strictly male matter."

Usually *The Wave* took a wallop at the marines. In an early issue it tells of the heroism of a marine who while fighting fire ashore at Trinidad "gallantly saved a goat, but was later confined in the brig for not returning the animal to its owner."

The printing plant of the sheet consisted of a foot power press installed in the port brig. The editor did all the typesetting and press work, but profited largely from the advertising of tradesmen near the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

C. A. Freeman.



Big Timber

Dan went down without knowing what had struck him

It was a clever and powerful enemy who blocked every turn of Dan Ryan, Northwest lumberjack, as he tried to get his logs out; yet Dan was sure that enemy did not know why he fought so determinedly

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Flames of Feud," "In Self-Defense," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

DAN RYAN, reaching the age of twenty-one, learns from his three brothers that his share of his grandfather's estate is a large and valuable tract of timber between the Twin Rivers, near Puget Sound. But Dan finds a joker in the deck—his holdings are entirely surrounded by land owned by his grandfather's bitter rival, old Tully Lynch.

Dan can cut his timber, but he has no way of getting it to market, inasmuch as Lynch, who desires the timber, refuses him passage over his land. Dan

assembles a logging crew, under the leadership of Skid-Road Johnson, an old-timer and a fighter, and succeeds through a ruse in getting Lynch to transport the crew and supplies into Dan's holdings. Dan again out-sharps Lynch by buying logging equipment from the latter through an agent.

Dan starts logging operations and is nearly killed when a high-climber's safety belt breaks as he is using it. The belt has been filed nearly through, and Dan suspects Bull Purnell, Lynch's logging boss.

This story began in the Argosy for August 22.

Dan meets Joan Lynch, daughter of his enemy, and they become friends, much to the annoyance of Lynch and Winslow Sheridan, a dude who is hanging around Joan. Dan confides to her that his plan for getting his logs out is to demand right of way over her father's land to a county road that is to be constructed past Lynch's property. Dan invites the girl to the movies in a near-by town with him and she accepts. She asks him not to call for her at her father's house, to avoid trouble, but Dan insists upon meeting her there. Tully Lynch confronts him at the door.

CHAPTER V (Continued).

DOUBLE-CROSSED?

"WELL, what do you want?" Lynch growled, bristling. From a room that evidently served as a study and office loomed Bull Purnell. Whenever Bull sighted an enemy he unconsciously clenched his fists and prepared to advance. In all his career he had never been beaten in a fight. Possibly this was because of the fact most of his enemies were smaller men.

"Want him thrown out, Mr. Lynch?" he queried.

Lynch motioned his subordinate back with a gesture. "Let's find out what he wants first," he crisply suggested. "Well, Ryan, out with it!"

"I'm here to escort your daughter to the theater, Mr. Lynch," Dan coolly replied.

"Throw him out!" Lynch shrilly ordered.

"No!" Ryan stated with a ring of conviction. "Bull Purnell isn't going to throw me out of here or any other place."

The girl brushed by both Purnell and her father, then stepped outside. "I am ready, Danny," she said loud enough for all three men to hear. Dan Ryan was eager to leave the scene, but he lingered a moment lest Purnell and Lynch get the idea he was taking advantage of a woman's invitation to beat a retreat.

Neither mentioned the incident on their way to the theater. The program was indifferent, which appeared to work no particular hardship on either. Later they enjoyed a midnight lunch together at a small restaurant. The Lynch home was dark except for a porch light when they returned. "I'm running down to Olympia to arrange for that road to the highway which I told you about in confidence," he informed her in a low tone. "I'll be in Seattle next week-end. May I see you?"

She caught the hopeful note in his voice. "If you wish," she informed him, "but why the hopeful tone?"

"You'd be surprised just how hopeful I am in this case," he said so seriously that she felt confused. It was the expression on his face more than his words that disturbed the girl. "I hope soon to rate a position in your affections, somewhere between the mare and Winslow Sheridan. Later on, I'd like to nose out the mare."

She burst out laughing. "Good night, Dan," she cried gayly. "I'll see you next week-end."

SEVERAL days had passed since Dan's visit to town. He was sitting in his logging camp office, totalling the board feet measurements of the logs in his various cold decks, when the telephone rang.

"This is Ole Hanson," a voice said. "Bull Purnell, he tell us we can't go

through with pack horses and grub. Aye tell him we can, and then the fight she start. We take one good lickin' and Bull Purnell he say he's sorry Dan Ryan ain't along to take one lickin' too. Aye want to know what to do?"

"Stay right where you are until I get down there," Ryan barked. Two seconds later he spilled through the open door, and yelled for Skid-Road Johnson. "Pick up a half dozen men who like a fight, and come on," he cried.

The entire crew with the exception of two fallers and the whistle-punk responded—they were too far away to hear what it was all about. Two hours' swift walk brought them to the scene of the recent fight. The sod was pretty well chewed up from calk boots. Buttons, pieces of clothing, several snoose boxes and assorted bits of skin were scattered about.

"What are you looking for?" Skid-Road inquired, as he caught Ryan examining the ground.

"When loggers fight, most anything can happen," Ryan answered. "Here are two teeth, and I thought I might find an ear or an eyeball or two."

A half mile away from the scene Dan came upon his scattered and beaten forces. Every man present showed marks of battle. Pack horses were still in a high state of excitement. One of Hanson's eyes was closed.

"Aye don't know how Purnell found out we were coming through with grub, but he was waiting for us. He say you choose between go back or take lickin'. Aye say, we don't go back, nor take lickin'. But I bane wrong. We go back and take lickin' too!"

"Come on," Dan directed, taking command. "We've got a right to use this trail, and we're going to use it. And what's more I'm not going to ap-

peal to the government for help either. I don't propose to get into the habit of taking lickings from the Lynch crowd."

They proceeded nearly a mile before opposition in the form of Bull Purnell and a fair-sized gang of men appeared. Purnell planted his huge feet in the center of the trail, and flanked by his men who were scattered out in the form of a huge wedge, awaited results.

Dan Ryan did not even glance behind him to see whether his men were ready—he knew! The battered members of his party were seeking revenge; the others were spoiling for a fight.

THE battle that followed would have filled the largest arena in the world at twenty-five dollars a head. Dan Ryan waited for Purnell to start the first blow, then beat him to the punch. As Purnell staggered backward, two of his men rushed the young logger. But before they ever reached him, two of Dan's men were at them. The impact of heavy fists against bare flesh filled the air. The men in charge of the pack train delayed just long enough to secure their animals, then tore into the fray.

Purnell's dish face with a nasty leer of confidence bore down on Dan. Dan had too much sense to permit the powerful woods boss to get hold of him.

He stepped back as Purnell closed in, and drove his fists against the man's jaw. Purnell's arms came out and groped the air. Again Dan had stepped back. He circled around the powerful brute as a cooper moves about a barrel. He drove in punch after punch, but it was far from a one-sided combat. Again and again the logger was shaken to his very foundations as Purnell's fists smashed into his body. Tremendous power was behind each blow, and

once he was lifted a few inches off the ground.

Lights danced before his eyes, but he instinctively covered up and backed away until his head cleared. For the first time in his life doubt filled Bull's eyes. He sensed the battle was going against him, and with a roar of fury he rushed Ryan and forced him backward into a thicket.

Dan started to sidestep and at the same moment saw Purnell's fist coming. He instinctively ducked and at the same instant a tremendous roar filled his ears, then . . . blackness.

Dan Ryan opened his eyes to find himself drenched from a bucket of water Skid-Road had tossed over his head. "What happened?" he queried, as he got slowly to his feet.

"As near as I can figure," Skid-Road dryly observed, "you stopped one of Bull Purnell's punches. Don't take it too much to heart. No man has ever licked him yet. You've got plenty of company. You might organize a defeated candidate club and limit the membership to those who have fought Bull Purnell."

"I can't account for this lump on the back of my head," Dan growled, gingerly rubbing an obvious lump. "I've heard of hitting a man so hard his back teeth would jar loose, but this is a new one."

"The important thing is," Skid-Road said, "we licked them! Now let's get our grub through before reinforcements arrive. Don't it strike you as kind of queer they knew exactly when our pack train would arrive? Did you tell anybody? Joan Lynch, for example?"

"Yes, I told her," Dan confessed, "but . . ."

"I know how you feel," Skid-Road cut in, "and it's hard to believe. Did

she say anything to you about falling from that tree?"

"No," Ryan answered. "How could she know about it? I didn't tell her!"

"But," Skid-Road explained, "I sent her the rope showing the core had been cut nearly in two. She's a logger's daughter! She knew what that meant! And yet, she didn't even mention it. And I'd like to bet you something else. She told her father that you expect the State to condemn a road from the highway through his property to your cold deck. I'll bet you ten dollars Tully Lynch has blocked that by this time."

A single word came into Dan Ryan's mind—a word he rejected despite evidence pointing toward it. Double-crossed?

CHAPTER VI.

CHECKMATED.

WHEN Dan Ryan arrived in the little mill town there was an atmosphere of desertion about the Lynch summer home. Casual inquiries indicated father and daughter had left several days previous. His camp was in operation, as a trainload of logs being dumped into the bay proved. Dan was in high spirits as he called upon his State highway friend. "I'm all ready to furnish proof that I need that road you promised me," he announced. "Here's a photograph of one logging camp going full blast. Also several cold decks of logs waiting to be transported."

The other shifted uncomfortably on his seat. "I told you, Dan," he explained, "if you brought proof of need of a road, a road would be condemned across Lynch's property, and that is exactly what is going to happen. But

the powers that be have postponed building the road until next summer. It will cost less to build in dry weather. I want you to know that I battled for immediate action. I battled so dog-gone hard that I almost got in wrong."

"That goes without saying," Dan returned. "But a road next summer isn't going to do me much good. Just who inspired this postponement?"

"Tully Lynch. He appeared to know all about your plans. He explained to my superiors that you were a nice young fellow trying to get along, and he was all for letting you have your road—next year. He pointed out it would cost fifty per cent more to build a road in winter, and . . . well . . . you know in these days when a man preaches economy he becomes eloquent."

"Confound him," Ryan snorted. "The old cuss is clever! If he'd come right out and said he was opposed to the road, I could have overcome that. But pulling for it, and praising me, then preaching economy turned the trick for him. I wonder if I can hang on until next summer? My brothers advanced me fifty thousand dollars believing I could repay it in a few months. They're going to need that money before winter's over. But I still have one ace in the hole!"

"You can't beat that! What is your ace, Dan?" the other queried.

Ryan walked to the window and glanced at the distant mountains. "There's a lot of snow up there and there'll be more before winter's over with," he drawled.

"I believe I get you, Dan," the other chuckled.

The young logger was in a disturbed state of mind as he headed for Seattle. "If I wasn't such a cussed chump," he

growled, "and so dog-gone deeply in love with Joan, I'd swear she had tipped off my plan to her father. Maybe some day I'll learn to keep my mouth shut. But she has the reputation for being such a square shooter, and a man in love just naturally wants to tell the girl about his plans, hopes and ambitions. That's one reason why it is said a man in love is a fool."

He managed to shake off his dejected mood by the time he arrived at his brothers' offices in Seattle. Something in their attitude caused him to inwardly observe, "All is not well!" If there was any more trouble he might as well hear about it and get it over with, so he could enjoy the remainder of his stay. Trouble enough when he got back to the woods again.

"Well, who's been hanging crape around here?" he inquired.

THE elder brother, as usual, acted as spokesman. "We loaned you fifty thousand dollars, Dan, figuring we would not need it until spring. By that time logs would be coming off your timberland in a steady stream. But your friend Lynch has got hold of some of the men who have been advancing us credit. Out of a clear sky we've been cut off at the pockets. Of course it is part of Lynch's scheme to beat you. Our rôle is that of the innocent bystander, Dan. We're going to stick with you, if we lose every cent we have, but we figured you'd want to know the exact situation."

"Won't the bank cash my note for you?"

"Certainly," his brother replied. "The bank would doubtless turn around and sell it to Lynch and where would you be?"

Dan pondered on this angle for several minutes. It was obvious his

brothers were prepared to see him through even though they suffered a serious financial loss. Possibly they felt the prick of conscience because they had unloaded the timberland onto him. Presently Dan stepped to the telephone and called the weather bureau. He asked a number of questions which, after a delay, were answered. Then he turned to his brothers.

"I am taking several chances on Lynch, so I might as well take one more. Suppose you increase that note to sixty thousand dollars, extend it to May 1, then turn it over to the bank. That will put you in the clear immediately, and give me an additional breathing spell and ten thousand dollars. If I haven't licked Lynch by May 1, the note won't make any difference one way or another."

"Now remember, kid," the elder brother warned. "You're to consider yourself and not us in this matter. We advanced the money and we'll see you through."

There was little doubt of Tully Lynch's activity. Even with the extension of time and the additional ten thousand dollars the bank almost snapped up the note. Lynch had long since learned there was nothing as powerful as a financial club unless it be an unusually keen mind.

DAN'S reception at the Lynch town home was different. There was no Bull Purnell glowering in the background. A servant took Ryan's hat and overcoat, and indicated a comfortable chair. "Miss Joan will be down in a few minutes," he informed the young logger. "Shall I announce your presence to Mr. Lynch?"

"Oh, no," Dan answered with a careless gesture. "Perhaps it's just as well not to disturb him on my account."

Had the servant understood the situation no doubt he would have informed Lynch of Ryan's arrival. Somewhere a door opened and Winslow Sheridan's elegant voice floated down a corridor.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" he laughed. "I'm still chuckling over the jolly old incident. You see this Bull Purnell was having his hands full. Ryan, the bouncer, wouldn't stand up and fight. He would dash in, deliver a few blows then step out of range. But Bull was too smart for him. He maneuvered him around, then backed him into the brush. One of Bull's men was crouching under cover. He leaped to his feet and struck Ryan on the back of his head with a rock. Haw! Haw! Haw! Clever, eh? And Ryan still thinks it was Bull's mighty punch that knocked him out. I just fairly die with laughter every time I recall the incident."

Whereupon Mr. Winslow Sheridan doubled up for a period. When he had regained his composure his tone became serious. "Joan appears to have taken quite a fancy to this fellow. Isn't there something you can do about it, Mr. Lynch? He should be put in his place."

"I'm putting him in his place."

"In a business way, yes," Sheridan conceded. "But socially. . . ."

"Rot!" exclaimed Lynch. "Ryan is a passing fancy. He may look a bit heroic to Joan since he saved her mare, but that will pass. When I smash the impudent cuss, her admiration will vanish. She has been surrounded by winners too many years for a beaten man to have any appeal. Sheridan, what you should do is to assert yourself. Go right after the girl, and take her by storm. Sweep her off her feet! That is the way, and the only way, to win Joan Lynch."

Then some one closed the door and Ryan heard no more. But he was smiling with glee over Lynch's formula for winning his daughter. "Thanks for the tip!" he said softly.

Fifteen minutes passed before Joan put in an appearance. Either she was delighted to see Dan or else her acting was perfect. "I'm late, of course, Dan," she confessed, "but somehow the make-up wouldn't jell."

It was Dan's opinion there was mighty little make-up about the girl. "As soon as I can tell dad good-by I'll be with you." She hurried down the hall, opened the door, and thrust her head in. "I'm leaving, dad."

"Eh? What? Why, Joan, Sheridan is here."

"Yes, I know," she returned sweetly, "but Sheridan must have come over to spend the evening with you, because he knew that I had an engagement."

"Who with?" Lynch's voice was like the sharp bark of a terrier.

"Dan Ryan."

"Holy jump-up Jehoshaphat! What do you see in that cuss? Girl, you just about drive me crazy!"

"Now! Now! Dad," she pleaded. "Don't blow up. Be nice and come out and say hello to him."

"I'll say hello to him!" Dan heard a chair squeak, then the brisk *clump! clump!* of Lynch's heels on the polished floor.

"Good evening, Ryan," he snorted. "How are you?"

"Fine, all things considered," Dan answered pointedly. "How's the active Mr. Lynch?"

Lynch's eyes flashed, and his sideburns bristled. "Plenty active enough for you, my fine young buck!"

"Now that the cordial greetings have been exchanged," the girl interrupted, "suppose we go, Dan."

As they got into Dan's car, she said rather impulsively, "I wish you two would come to a truce. It would save you both money."

"That's quite true," Dan admitted, "but a truce would decide nothing. For the personal satisfaction of both your father and me, this thing has got to be fought to a decision."

LATER—very much later that night —Dan remembered Lynch's tip with regard to his daughter.

"Well, good night," she said and started to unlock the door.

"Not yet!" he said with a ring of determination, which caused her to glance up in surprise. He drew her beyond range of the porch light. "Joan, I'm leaving to-night for the second phase of the fight with your dad. I want to leave knowing that when the battle is over and the smoke is cleared away, you will marry me."

He saw by her expression she planned to put him off; to spar for time until she could decide in her own mind just how to handle the situation.

"No, Joan," he said, his face dangerously close to hers, and so much of love and adoration in his eyes that she was thrilled as never before, "I'm not going to even let you think about it. You don't have to think! I didn't! I knew! And so do you. You will marry me, won't you, Joan? There! I knew you would!"

He lifted her off her feet and kissed her again and again. She struggled, although not very desperately.

"But, Dan," she cried sharply, "I didn't say I would marry you. I didn't say . . . anything."

"You didn't have to, Joan. I saw it in your eyes, but now I'm going to hear you tell me that you love me, and that you'll marry me."

He held her very close. "Yes . . . yes . . . I love you . . . and I'll marry . . . no . . . I won't . . . maybe. Now you've got me so I don't know what I'm saying, but I do care for you a lot . . ." She was regaining her composure rapidly and was quite sure a bit of humor would save her for a moment or two. "Yes, Danny, I do think a lot of you," she repeated. "You have passed Winslow Sheridan, and . . . and, yes, you've even nosed out Dulcie."

But he was not easily put off. "I'm not going to leave," he said aggressively, "until it is settled. I . . ." At that moment the door opened and Tully Lynch stood before them in all the glory of his five feet three inches, clothed in an old-fashioned nightgown.

He bore down upon them with the cool breezes of Puget Sound whipping the nightgown around his thin shanks. "Ryan! Confound your impudence! I wish I'd had sense enough to bring a shotgun with me. Now get out! Before I go back and get it!"

"Maybe, Danny," Joan suggested in a low tone. "you had better go. Good night!"

"Good night, sweetheart!" he said loud enough for her father to hear. Then before Tully Lynch's blazing eyes, he kissed the girl and took his time about it.

SKID-ROAD JOHNSON was awaiting him at the little mill town when the boat docked. Dan gravely peeled off a ten dollar bill and extended it to his woods boss.

"So Tully Lynch blocked your road, eh?" Skid-Road observed. "Well, it was a safe bet for me, but just the same I hoped till the last that I would lose. Now that girl . . ."

"If we weren't such old friends, Skid-Road," Dan interrupted, "I'd

say, and I'd say it in a sharp tone of voice, to leave the girl out of it. Instead, knowing your intentions were good, I'll whisper in your shell-like ear that Miss Lynch and I are practically engaged."

"Blood is thicker'n water," Skid-Road thought, "and she's puttin' somethin' over on the lad. Some of these days I'm goin' to write her a letter. In the meantime, if Dan Ryan hasn't got sense enough to look after his own interests, I'll look after them for him. Why in the devil did he have to fall in love with her, of all girls?"

And yet, on reflection, Skid-Road was frank to admit he would have fallen in love with Joan himself had he been a few years younger. He sighed heavily at the injustice in the world. Women were made beautiful so that men would fall in love with them and get in trouble.

"I have another cheerful bit of news, too, Skid-Road," said Dan, interrupting Johnson's reflections. "Bull Purnell didn't knock me out that time."

"Yeah?" jeered Skid-Road. "You just folded up like a tent to fool him, I suppose. Well, you fooled me and the boys to the extent that we had plenty of time to go down to the river and bring back a bucket of cold water, and there sure was a goofy look in your eyes for several minutes after you got on your feet. If you weren't knocked out, then I've spent my life crocheting and not logging."

"Oh, I was out all right enough," Dan answered, "but I got rapped on the back of the head with a rock. I got that straight!"

"The devil you say!" Skid-Road cried impetuously, as Dan finished explaining. "Well, that's in keeping with the dirty work that Lynch crowd

usually puts over. But it's sweet news to me to know Bull didn't beat you. I've always had a hunch that if any man in the Northwest could take him, it was you."

"Cheer up," Dan predicted with obvious hope, "you'll see that little point settled before this fight's over."

CHAPTER VII.

ACE IN THE HOLE.

THE weeks passed swiftly, then an unexpectedly heavy snow forced Dan to shut down for a lengthy period. The young logger paid off his crew which promptly headed for Seattle for a good time. Skid-Road Johnson went along with them in order that he might round them up when needed. Dan Ryan resisted the desire to spend a few weeks in the city with Joan, and stayed on the job.

For two weeks after the storm, the weather bureau at Seattle talked in terms of high and low pressure areas, but the temperature remained below normal and there was skating on Green Lake within Seattle's city limits—something that rarely occurred. As the days passed and the sunshine and cold continued, Dan Ryan's buoyancy began to ooze. His prayer for a heavy fall of snow on the lower peaks had been answered. Now he wanted a chinook, which was the Indian's way of describing a warm, friendly wind from the south.

While Dan kept his eye on weather conditions at the camp, Skid-Road Johnson was keeping his eye both on the weather and on his men in Seattle. He was a daily caller at the weather bureau, which promised to give him at least twenty-four hours notice of rain. Despite all this, Skid-Road had ample

time for reflection, and this reflection eventually moved him to sit down and scrawl a letter:

DEAR MISS LYNCH:

I am writing to you to ask you to give Dan Ryan, one of the best men who ever stood in shoe leather, a decent break. He has got faith in you and so have I, but my faith is beginning to shake. He told you about getting the State to put through a road, but your father stopped that. How did your father find out? You must have told him. It's pretty hard to believe you did, but still a man remembers blood is thicker than water. You probably think you owe your loyalty to your father. Maybe you do, but he's smart enough to win his fight without resorting to dirty work such as cutting the core wire in Dan's rope almost in two. If Dan hadn't been lucky the fall from the tree would have killed him. I sent you the rope so you could see for yourself. The show-down will soon come, and I'm asking you to make your father and his crowd fight clean. You don't need to worry about Dan's gang—he won't stand for anything but clean fighting.

Yours respectfully,

SKID-ROAD JOHNSON.

The woods boss registered the letter to make certain it reached the girl. It was evidently a good day for correspondence, because almost at the same hour Tully Lynch paced back and forth in his private office as he dictated a letter to his stenographer. It was addressed to Mr. Daniel Ryan, and it read:

Please be advised I hold your note, purchased through the bank, for sixty thousand due two weeks from to-day, at which time I shall expect payment in full.

Yours truly,

TULLY LYNCH.

"There!" Lynch cried, flipping his coat-tails with his hands which were crossed behind his back. "That will give him something to think about."

"I'll bet that will surprise him," Bull Purnell observed, when Tully Lynch related the incident.

"It shouldn't," Lynch answered briskly. "If he's got as much brains as I think he has he knows I'd move heaven and earth in order to get that note."

The weather had not changed in the slightest the following day, but at noon Bull Purnell arrived breathlessly at the Lynch home. "Skid-Road Johnson came out of the weather bureau early this morning, Mr. Lynch, and he legged it down to the skid-road where he began roundin' up his crew. Ryan figures to float those logs down the river when the high water comes. That ain't a navigable stream, Mr. Lynch, and you can stop him from takin' those logs through your property. A court of law. . . ."

"My dear Purnell," Tully Lynch interrupted, "I'm still doing my own thinking. True, a court of law would get out an injunction against him. He has sense enough to know it. I observed one thing—that every one of his cold decks is above normal high water mark. But a chinook will fill that river bank-full, and pick up every one of those logs and start it downstream. It falls in the category of an act of God. There's only one way to beat him, Purnell."

"How's that?" the woods boss eagerly inquired.

"Take the pile driver to that narrow part of the river, and drive piles for a bridge. Of course it's a subterfuge, but we can use a railroad bridge at that particular place and he'll have one devil of a time proving it to be a subterfuge. Take a gag of men and have them catch the first logs that come down the stream and jam them into the bridge. The rest will pile up behind. We may

lose our bridge, but we'll have a jam of the finest logs in the Northwest on our property.

"If Ryan squawks, I'll claim damages—plenty of damages. If he don't squawk, I'll bring the cherry-pickers down and help myself." A cherry-picker is a derrick-like device mounted on a flat car that reaches forth and picks up logs along the right of way. "You've got your orders, Purnell, now light out! And don't let those Ryan logs get through or I'll skin you alive!"

SEVERAL hours later Joan put in an appearance. Lynch rubbed his hands gleefully together as he explained in detail Dan Ryan's predicament. "That bridge across the river will jam his logs and he can have all that ever get to the bay."

"Dad," she said seriously, "I want you to call off this fight. I want you to make a truce with Dan Ryan on fair terms."

"You can have most anything you want, young woman," Lynch retorted, "but you can't have that. I've got my opinion of a man who will let a girl fight for him."

"Dan doesn't know that I'm fighting for him," she answered sharply, "and I'm not! I'm merely asking you to fight clean—which you haven't done. Who told you he expected the State to put a road through over which he could ship his logs?"

"My common sense, sister, my common sense," he said tartly. "It was the logical thing for him to do. Naturally, I blocked it. Just as naturally as I'm going to block his floating the logs down the river. I know he's planning on the chinook to help him out! So, why shouldn't I block him?"

"But why did you try to kill him at the start? That is what angers me,"

she said, breathing hard from indignation.

He grew serious at once. "You know better than to charge me with anything like that!"

"Well, that's what happened," she answered. "Bull Purnell was back of that—no one else. How do I know? Because, Skid-Road Johnson sent the rope and severed core wire to me. The rope never reached me, so naturally he made inquiries. It was my turn to do a little investigating, which I did. I've checked up and found Bull Purnell received the package when it arrived. The wrapping was broken slightly, and he, of course, saw the contents. That package never reached me, which, in itself is sufficient proof of his guilt."

"I don't believe Purnell did any such thing," Tully Lynch cried, his face red with rage. "Another thing, it is positively shameful the way you've been treating Winslow Sheridan. The man has been faithful in his courtship. He comes from a fine family, and is amply able to care for you, and yet you treat him like a dog."

"I don't treat him like a dog, dad," she said defensively. "I'm merely not interested in him."

"Yes, you'll waste your time on this infernal young Ryan. What's got into you, anyway? Now get this, young woman, and don't forget it. I don't put my foot down often, but when I do, it stays down. You leave Dan Ryan alone. Forget him. You don't have to marry Winslow Sheridan or anybody for that matter. But you're not going to marry Dan Ryan. Do I make myself clear?"

"As clear as a crystal," she answered, "and as definite as the English language permits. Now, do you know what I'm going to do? Well, to square up for Bull Purnell's dirty

work, I'm going to Dan Ryan and let him know all about the bridge you plan to build to stop his logs."

"If you do, Joan Lynch, I'll call that rank treason, and you're no daughter of mine! Furthermore you needn't come back here. But you can get a job and put some of that expensive education I gave you to practical use!" He listened attentively as though he expected the girl to relent. When he turned around she had left the room. A few minutes later he heard the roar of her motor as it sped down the driveway.

THE whinnying of Dan Ryan's horse brought the logger from his cabin. Another horse was easing up the Forest Service trail, now a smooth, unbroken expanse of snow two feet deep. On the clear, cold air came a girl's voice crying encouragement to her mount.

"Good Lord!" Dan cried. "Joan!" Then he did a very wise thing. He darted back into the cabin and prepared some hot tea. When he again looked out, Joan was in the clearing, and urging her horse toward him. He held forth his arms, and she dropped into them—exhausted. He carried the girl into the cabin and seated her in a chair. "Look after the mare, Danny," she pleaded. "I'm all right, merely exhausted."

"My gosh, girl! Did you ride over the big log, and it covered deep with snow?"

"I had to get across, Danny," she confessed. "But I led Dulce, both for her sake and mine. We made it all right." He led the mare to the stable, covered her with a blanket and returned to Joan. For several minutes she was content to relax completely and sip the hot tea, then her plentiful supply

of reserve power asserted itself and she began speaking.

"I suppose," she wearily informed him, "I could have called you on the telephone, but..." She shook her head. "That wouldn't have been satisfactory. I'm here to make restitution in a small way for the tactics resorted to by my father. Skid-Road Johnson wrote me about your rope breaking and..."

"Your father doesn't fight that way," he interrupted. "That is some of Bull Purnell's work, I know."

"Yes, but he employs such men as Bull Purnell," she insisted, "and so I am here to tell you, Dan, that father's going to demand payment of that note when it's due. He bought it through the bank and the bank obeyed his orders to make things tough for your brothers."

"Oh, yes," he answered, "I realize that. In a business struggle it's fair enough."

"And, Dan, father guessed you intended to ship your logs over the new road. I didn't tell him."

"I've never lost faith in you, Joan—not once."

"And he's guessed you intend to float your logs down river when the chinook comes—as it surely will with all this snow on the ground."

He grinned cheerfully. "I had a hunch he would figure that out also. He's a clever man, your father. But how can he stop it? Not by a court injunction because my cold decks are above normal high water mark, and a chinook is an act of God from a legal standpoint."

"He said something along the same line, Danny. But he plans to stop you. He's going to build a bridge across the river and jam your logs at that point."

For several moments Dan Ryan was

silent. Once or twice he shook his head rather sadly. "I'm sorry in a way you told me that," he said slowly. "Family pride and loyalty are great things in your family as in ours. Your father may . . . hold your dereliction against you."

He noticed she breathed rather hard as though with anger for several moments, then she whirled fiercely, her black eyes snapping with anger. "It's the first time we've ever clashed seriously. I told him I thought he wasn't playing fair with you, and I told him I was coming to tell you about the bridge. And he told me if I felt that way about it, I could try my hand at making my own way . . . in the world. Well..."

He picked her up in his arms and seated himself in the chair. "Any making of a way in the world, Joan, will be done together," he said gently. "As soon as this is over with, we're going to be married."

"No, we won't, Dan—not unless you beat dad and win this fight. And you know I'm not considering what winning means financially. It's the moral effect of victory that I am thinking of."

"Listen! What is that?"

He opened the door and far down the river came the pop of a locomotive plowing its way slowly through the snow. "It's your dad's construction train bringing up a pile driver and bridge crew," he announced.

"Where are your men?" she inquired, her face filled with concern.

"Skid-Road telephoned he was on his way," Dan answered. "It's queer you didn't pass them on the trail."

"I took several short cuts, and followed game trails. The elk have a trail through our timber. I'll give the mare a chance to rest up, then return."

"You'd better stay here, Joan," he suggested, "and see the finish!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BATTLE OF THE RIVER.

THERE is something so warm and friendly about a chinook wind that, naturally enough, it takes an important place in Indian legend. When an abnormal cold spell gripped the land in the early days and brought with it attendant ills, the chinook, rushing in from the south, was indeed a faithfully coming to their aid with its warmth. Often it came at night, as it did in this instance.

Dan Ryan turned his own cabin over to Joan. Assured she was comfortable, he stalked over to the bunk house and built a roaring fire, knowing the men would arrive some time during the night. At nine o'clock he looked out on a cold, crisp world, and at twelve o'clock the cold air had mysteriously vanished.

There was no wind in the tree tops, but magically, there was warmth, friendly warmth. Now that this girl had cast her lot with him, victory was doubly important. Defeat he could stand personally, but the humiliation incident to defeat was something the girl could not accept.

Silent, plodding figures came out of the snow-covered woods and down the trail. They stamped snow off their boots and entered the bunk house. To a man they carried mackinaws over their shoulders—the last two miles had been warm ones. "The chinook is here, and so is Joan Lynch," Dan said in a low tone. "I've turned my cabin over to her. Skid-Road, she was shooting square from the first."

Skid-Road nodded. The air was

heavy with drying woolen garments as the men gathered about the red-hot stove. "It was I that doubted, Dan, not you. I'll tell her so," Skid-Road said. He stepped outside and cast a critical eye toward the tree tops, dark against a starlit sky. Here and there the tops were moving slightly. And even as he watched, the first breeze came across the ridges and the forest stirred as though awakening from a long sleep.

The wind increased in strength until their tops roared like falling water. From the southwest came tumbling black clouds—the chinook legions of warriors eager for the fray. Within an hour the first raindrops had fallen on snow-covered roofs. A thousand rivulets formed on each roof and dripped into the snow beneath the eaves, and presently came the pitter-patter of rain on tar paper.

JOAN had looked upon snow-covered trees when she retired. She awakened to the shrill blast of the donkey whistle, and looked upon a forest washed clean of snow. Warm rain was whipped in every direction as gusts of wind howled down the draws and cañons. Men moved around in the slush which had already absorbed the maximum of water.

Above the roar of the wind through the tree tops, the rattle of rain and the shouts of the men, came the thunder of the South Fork. It was rising rapidly after the cold spell and had already reached its average height.

Dan Ryan saw Joan peering from the window and waved. Faintly his voice came, "Breakfast's ready whenever you want it! You'll find a pair of tin pants and a slicker hanging on the wall. Put 'em on if you want to see the fun."

She gulped down her breakfast, pulled on a pair of tin pants which were much too large, and hurried down to the river bank. Three huge logs had been placed side by side. Two others were being put on top. Men were busily engaged binding the five together with heavy cable. Other men were making desperate efforts to prevent the cold decks from spilling into the river, which was already eating away the dirt underneath.

In spite of their efforts, occasional logs bobbed down stream. Men galloped along the bank, leaped aboard and worked them ashore. Dan Ryan wanted no logs jamming at the bridge just yet.

Above them the snow line was receding swiftly. Every depression along the banks and among the mountain peaks carried its quota of water, and the South Fork began to rise in veritable waves.

"You had better ride down to the bridge," Dan shouted at the girl. The rain had whipped the color into his cheeks and his blue eyes were dancing with excitement. The damp air had changed his disordered sandy hair into a mass of ringlets. Here, indeed, was a man fighting the battle of his life and enjoying it.

It was later when the donkey engine rolled the five lashed logs into the river. On the rear stood Skid-Road Johnson, his sharp calks eating into the wood as he handled a long pike pole. In front stood Dan Ryan with a pike pole ready to steer the logs clear of sand-bars. Along the shore men were rolling other logs into the water and leaping aboard. They moved faster than Dan's battering ram and disappeared around the bend. Ten minutes elapsed before Dan sighted the new bridge.

The pile driver had been hauled

back to safety, but it had completed its work. Heavy piles stood close together and were held in place by huge bridge timbers. "That's no bridge," Skid-Road shouted above the roar. "That was made to stop our logs and nothing else. Look! Bull Purnell and his crowd are swarming along the top, ready to swing the logs sidewise so they'll pile up."

Dan's men were pushing their own logs toward the bank, and the instant they grounded the men leaped ashore and swarmed toward the bridge. The bridge head became a mass of swearing, struggling men who flailed and clouted each other without mercy for possession of the structure.

"Look out," Skid-Road warned, "or your battering ram will go between the piles and everything will be lost."

He ran forward, drove the point of his pole into the rocky bottom, and heaved until the pole was bent like a bow. The back end started to swing around and the two men ran madly in their efforts to keep it on a straight course.

BULL PURNELL'S mighty voice thundered orders to his men, and half a dozen sprang to his aid, leaning far out, driving their pike poles into the head of the battering ram in the hopes of sliding it through. Carried on the crest of the mad stream, the wake behind the battering ram was tremendous.

"Brace yourself," Dan cried. "Here comes the crash, and we don't want to be knocked into the river."

Almost at the same instant came a shuddering impact. Purnell's men were running like rats. Bull himself turned an instant too late. The main bridge pier almost vanished under his feet

with a splintering and groaning of timbers. He made a frantic grasp, missed, then leaped at the ram. The calks of his boots bit deep into the wood—and held.

To avoid a flying timber, Skid-Road Johnson had driven his pole into the bottom and vaulted within five feet of shore. A half dozen hands were reaching down to drag him out. The ram was lumbering downstream, carrying the bridge débris on its nose. It lurched violently as the under log struck a boulder and the wreckage spilled over the sides. The ram was free.

Dan Ryan looked back in time to see his men swarming over the shore end of the wreckage and with pike poles send off his logs which were coming downstream by the hundreds as the cold decks spilled into the river.

Then he turned to face Bull Purnell. Purnell's face twisted into a nasty leer. "You got your logs through, Ryan, but you'll never live to boast about it."

Murder, cold murder, was in his eyes as he stood undecided. Then like a flash he charged Dan with the intention of running the sharp steel spike of the pike pole into his breast. Somewhat belatedly Ryan hurled his own pole as one might throw a spear. Only a sudden lowering of the shoulders prevented the spike finding its mark.

As Ryan regained his balance, Purnell thrust violently, and Dan saved himself by a quick twist. The spike slid across his chest and buried itself in his heavy clothing. He gripped the pole with both hands and struggled to free himself. At the same time Bull dug his calks into the log and tried to force Ryan into the water. Here the heavier and stockier man had a distinct advantage.

Again and again Dan's feet gave

ground and he sought to free himself. With a final charge Purnell forced him backward into the river. He struggled upward and looked about. Scores of logs were bobbing on the surface of the stream. As they traveled faster than the ram, several were abreast and others some distance ahead. Dan selected the largest and hauled himself out. For a moment he stood there while the icy water ran down his clothing in cascades. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of Joan Lynch.

Horse, mare and girl were splashed with mud from head to foot. As she pulled back the horse for a brief glimpse before the trail turned away from the river again, he could sense rather than see her desperation. Had she a rifle, the girl doubtless would have opened fire on Bull Purnell. Under the circumstances, she could only clench her hands impotently and await the outcome.

DAN waited until the area between himself and the ram was almost bridged with logs, then he began to leap from log to log until with a final rush he shot a full six feet through space toward the more stable ram.

Purnell was there to meet him, but there was too much momentum behind the younger man, and Bull staggered backward from the impact. Dan was on his feet instantly and retreating until he could organize himself. Far up the river came a familiar form—Skid-Road Johnson was riding logs to the rescue. His raw-boned figure ran the length of a log, leaped to another, ran down that—on and on. He had the advantage of both the speed of the river and his own legs. As he came alongside, he cupped his hands and

shouted, "Go to it, Dan! I'm going to referee this fight and see that Bull don't pull any dirty stuff!"

Again Purnell attempted his rushing tactics. There was not much room for Ryan's footwork. All too often he found it necessary to stand his ground and take Bull's mighty blows. The first few jarred him all over, and a wave of nausea went through his body from the stomach punches, then to his delight he found he could take them easily.

Confidence came with a rush as he drove blow after blow into the mighty logger's stomach. Purnell no longer breathed through his nose, but his mouth hung open in a queer twisted manner as his breath came in sobs. There was less speed to his punches, and suddenly Dan shifted his attack and with his full strength drove his fist against Purnell's half-open jaw. The click of his feet came sharply above the roar of the flood. It was followed by the smack of Dan's wet fist against the same spot. Purnell's knees trembled and sagged.

Again Dan drove his fist against the massive jaw. This time Bull Purnell dropped, and before the young logger could grasp his clothing, Purnell had slipped between the ram and a floating log. Dan dropped his legs in between ram and logs.

"Look out," Skid-Road warned, "or you'll break both legs."

"He's got to have something to hang onto," Ryan shouted, "or he'll drown."

Almost at the same instant he felt Bull Purnell's mighty clutch. While Dan hung on, the desperate logger came hand over hand up his leg, and by sheer strength forced his shoulders between the narrow opening. His paw gripped the top of the ram, and with

Ryan's help he scrambled aboard. He got half to his knees as though considering the resumption of the attack, and then, with a groan, collapsed—beaten.

THE little mill town was surprised to see five huge logs lashed together with a cable come floating down the stream. Dan Ryan was standing in the center; Bull Purnell lay sprawled out near by. On another log rode Skid-Road Johnson.

The flood waters shot the ram and its human load into the bay, already gray from the muddy flood. Boomsticks were strung between dolphins—pilings driven into the ground. Men ran along the boomsticks with pike poles and fended the constantly arriving logs into position. The ram came to a stop against a section of logs, and Bull Purnell got to his feet. Without a word he made his way over the bobbing logs to the shore.

A tugboat steamed in as close as it could without running aground. The captain turned a megaphone toward the drenched figure standing lightly balanced on a log and watching the river deliver his logs. "Where do you want this stuff towed, Ryan?" the skipper bellowed through a megaphone.

"I promised to deliver it f. o. b. Gardner's mill pond, Lake Union, Seattle, and that's where it's to go," Dan called back. "After you deliver the first boom, come back for a second—it will be waiting for you."

Then he made his way slowly ashore. He glanced at the rain-drenched forest and the ever-receding snow-line. Deep in the woods lay his timber between Twin Rivers, and floating to the sea were hundreds of his best logs. Following came a loyal crew that rolled each stranded log into the river

that all might be in the bay before the water receded.

Joan Lynch's trim, mud-splashed figure rushed down to the beach to meet him.

"Oh, Danny," she cried, "are you hurt?"

He limped slightly where the log had smashed against his leg as he held it away from the raft that his enemy might crawl to safety. His face was cut and bruised from that enemy's fists and he felt slightly ill from the beating that he had taken around the stomach. But he stood a battered, drenched victor, the only man who had ever beaten Bull Purnell with his fists; the only man who had ever beaten Tully Lynch by resourcefulness. Yes, and the only man who had found his way into Joan Lynch's heart.

"And you won, Danny," she was saying.

"You mean, we won," he corrected. "It was our battle, yours and mine, and . . ." He lowered his voice. "Here comes your father."

Tully Lynch stalked aggressively toward them. The rain had drenched his sideburns until they no longer bristled, but lay about his jaws, sodden and dispirited. But aside from that, the little logger was the bantam rooster of old. He stepped briskly up and regarded the pair through snapping eyes. The silence was becoming painful. Dan Ryan grinned and held out his hand.

"What do you say, dad," he drawled, "to letting bygones be bygones? You've won all your fights up until now, so be a good loser and congratulate the man who had a lot of luck along with his victory."

"Victory!" Lynch cried shrilly. "Victory! Where do you get that victory stuff? How did you ever get the idea I was defeated? Why, confound your impudence, I've just won the greatest battle of my life."

"Ever since Joan was sixteen years old I've been scared to death for fear she would marry one of these la-de-da elegant boys she was always dragging home, or who were always hanging around with a dying calf expression in their eyes. Men like Winslow Sheridan and . . . Well, you know the type. And so when a real man came along I was scared to death for fear the little chump would let the chance slip through her fingers, and that's why I tried to force Winslow Sheridan upon her and why I forbade her having anything to do with you. I know her! And that's why I made it so dog-gone tough for you. I wanted to see whether you were big timber or just a sapling—whether you had the brains and the stuff to deserve my little girl." Tully Lynch's eyes grew moist with emotion. "Come closer, son, so that I can shake that big paw of yours. You kids have my blessing, and it comes right from the heart."

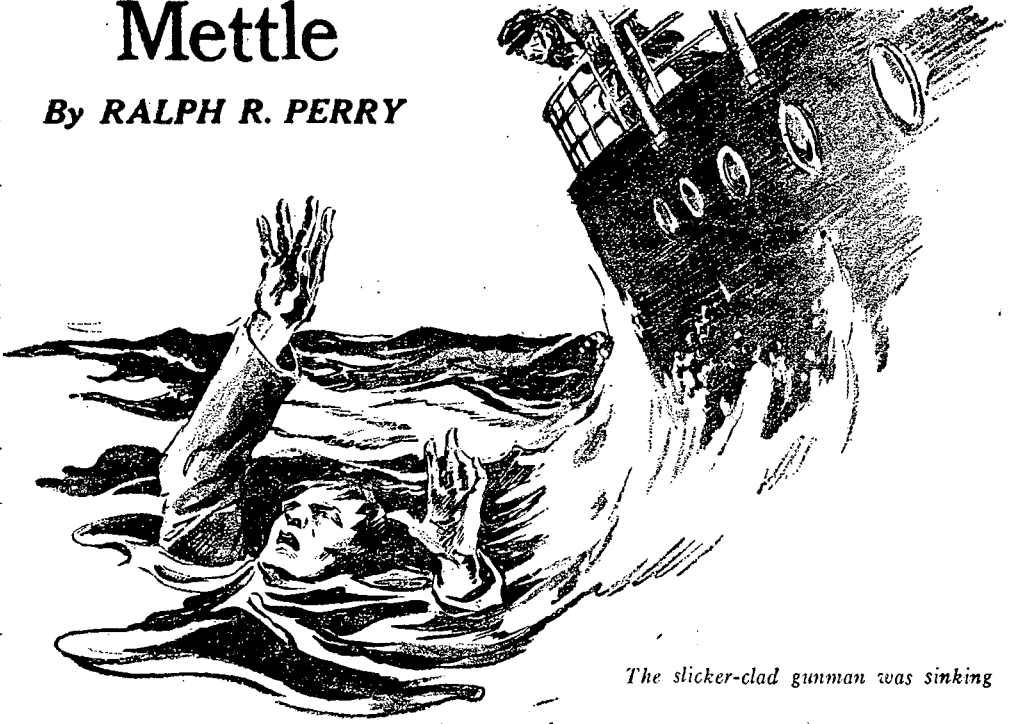
THE END.

ANOTHER great story of the woods and the men who conquer them is coming to you next month—a war of rival logging crews in the Wisconsin forests, with all the power of wealth and the law trying to crush one scrapping lumberjack. In the September 19 ARGOSY.

THE FIGHTING PRODIGAL, by ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Mettle

By RALPH R. PERRY



The slicker-clad gunman was sinking

Eli Bascom and John Keyo were salty as Cape Cod herring and different as night from day—but which was stronger no one knew till that unexpected show-down on the Atlantic

QUOHAUG INLET is a town situated on the Maine coast not far from the Canadian line. The radio and the summer boarder make it less isolated than it was, but despite an antenna stretched between every barn and house roof, despite the sign "Boats to Hire" on every wharf, the greatest boon to the permanent inhabitants is still a lively and long-lasting source of gossip.

The rivalry between the churches is perennial. The feud between the families who cater to the city folk and those hardier souls who still attempt to wring a living from soil and sea, and whose dependence is limited to the sale of vegetables and fish, keeps tongues

moving sluggishly through the ice-locked months. The paramount dispute, however, was the discussion concerning Eli Bascom and John Keyo.

Every village has sectarian and economic squabbles, but Quohaug Inlet alone possessed two young men of whom one insisted on being first, while the other refused to be second. Half of Quohaug Inlet held that Eli was smart as a whip and would make a name for himself yet; that John was a fool to play follow the leader forever. The other half maintained just as stoutly that Eli was a stuck-up show-off, and that some day John would prove it. Remarkably enough, the two men were friends.

Or seemed to be. At least they had played together, gone to school together, become fishermen, bought a sloop named the Betty H. and sailed together, but whether as partners or antagonists Quohaug Inlet could not decide; and John and Eli never said.

If their rivalry had a beginning which either could remember, it dated from Eli's dive from the top of the blasted pine. The two boys were twelve years old at the time. Eli, who was slender and wiry and quick on his feet, had made every kid in the village anywhere near his own age take his dare—except John.

The pine was an enormous tree which grew on a ledge fifteen feet from the edge of the bay, where the water was deep. It had recently been struck by lightning and had broken off forty feet up. The gang had been swimming off the edge of the ledge when Eli decided to establish his supremacy once and for all.

"Dast any of ye to dive off the top!" he shouted. "Double dast ye!"

Swimmers and divers all, they eyed the height and the distance to the water's edge, the splintered trunk from which the jump must be made.

"What's the use?" said John slowly. He was frowning. His broad face, which sun and wind could never tan to brown, had a vertical wrinkle of vehement protest. Eli had never observed that expression before, though he learned to know it well later.

"To show ye dast to, that's why!" he shrilled. "I'm a goin' to! You're a 'fraid-cat if ye don't follow me!" He swung himself into the tree and began to climb. He was halfway to the top before John hoisted himself into the branches. Eli never hesitated. He dived from the top. His body cleared the edge of the ledge by inches, and as

he rose he was rewarded by that supreme tribute to the daredevil, utter silence.

"Don't ye do it, Johnny! Ye can't jump as fur as he kin!" yelled an older boy. It was true. John was strong rather than active; by dozens of trials Eli had proven he could jump higher and farther. John had seen the narrow escape of the other, but he climbed upward methodically, poised himself on the jagged top for ten long seconds, and sprang outward. There was a groan while he was in mid-air. His dive was short. Though his face missed the rock, his legs did not. It was Eli who fished him out, unconscious, with a broken ankle that failed to knit properly, so that thereafter John walked with a limp.

"He shouldn't have jumped!" said half Quohaug Inlet.

"He didn't let Eli dare him, though!" said the other half. Neither of the boys ever mentioned the dive again. John's stiff leg ended contests of that sort, but there were others as the years passed, crises at school and aboard the fishing sloop Betty H. Many, many times Eli saw the frown of vehement and unspoken protest gather. Many, many times he hoped that on this occasion John would refuse, that he would sing out, "I won't! What's the use?"

That frown, as much as a flair for the spectacular, was responsible for Eli's reputation for recklessness, but wherever he led, John followed him. That probability, upon occasion, served to keep recklessness within bounds.

WITH ensign hoisted upside down to signal distress, a motor yacht drifted before a breeze that would soon become a gale. A raw mist that drove out of the southeast

reduced visibility to half a mile, but all too close to leeward behind that gray veil lay the sheer granite cliffs that stretched for miles north and south of Quohaug Inlet. Barring rescue, the fate of the Osprey depended on her anchors.

Rescue, however, was in sight. A fishing sloop, lettered Betty H., little more than half the size of the Osprey, was tacking toward her. Of the men on the deck of the yacht three were waving their arms excitedly, as though the sloop had not already seen them. The fourth man, whose gray head was bare to the raw wind, stood tight-lipped, with both hands clenched on the upper rope of the yacht's rail.

Carlson owned the Osprey. His daughter and her *fiancé* were aboard, but to him and them the coming of the sloop meant neither rescue nor safety. It was too small, its crew would be too few. They would fall victims to the same treachery that had made him a prisoner on his own yacht. These fishermen, like himself, would be unarmed. Like himself, the last thing they would expect would be to find pistol-toting dope runners aboard a seemingly helpless pleasure craft.

He glanced at the other three men. Thimble, Shorty, and Frog, they called themselves. Even with the hope of being able to warn the fishermen in mind, Carlson was unable to mask his hate of Thimble. The man felt the look, glanced up, and smiled.

"Think again, fella," he mocked. "You go below and keep your mug shut. Keep the dame quiet, too. I'm going to make my get-away in that sloop. If she comes alongside we'll hijack her. If she don't—if one of them rows over to us—" He hesitated. "If they do that," he went on to his companion, "I'll do the talking, see? I'll

act like I'm the owner of this yacht. Frog, you and Shorty are the crew. The rest are my guests, see? If the fishermen don't swallow that boloney—" Thimble looked at Carlson hard, and left the threat unfinished.

"I'll go below," Carlson answered. He could not bring himself to confess that he would substantiate Thimble's lie, yet he knew that he would. He had learned his lesson. The fishermen would have to take their chance. They would blunder. To blunder was logical, almost inevitable.

The Osprey had been bound from Boston to St. John's for a week's salmon fishing. It had carried only himself, his daughter Grace, and her *fiancé*, Bill Esterly. All were enthusiastic amateur yachtsfolk with lifelong familiarity with the water, and when the sea grew too rough the night before, they had taken shelter in one of the tiny harbors with which the Maine coast abounds.

THEY had got under way again at dawn, despite signs of threatening weather, and were hardly at sea before they sighted a large motor boat which had been less weatherwise the night before. It lay low in the water, its upper works were smashed from attempting to buck through the sea at high speed, and it flew signals of distress.

Carlson, greatly excited, had steered as near as he dared, eager to make a rescue. Even when three men put off in a dory, carrying with them a large suitcase of black tin, such as is sold to auto tourists, his suspicions had not been roused. The motor boat was sinking, and he did not blame the strangers for wishing to get their feet on a solid deck as soon as they could.

He met them at the rail, shouting

out he would have hot coffee for them in a second. Grace was at the wheel; Bill Esterly at the engines. Thimble had swung himself aboard with the suitcase. The little French Canadian called Frog had followed. Shorty, who was red-headed and looked like a mechanic, had stepped to the rail, and then, to Carlson's amazement, had pushed the boat in which they had come away from the yacht.

"We could have hoisted that aboard!" Carlson protested.

"To the devil with it!" Thimble said. "Where you heading for, mister?"

Carlson reached for the suitcase—which was swung out of his reach.

"I'll take care of that! I asked you where you were heading?"

"St. John's," said Carlson stiffly. From castaways one expects gratitude and good fellowship.

The three exchanged glances.

"We came from there." Thimble's smile was quite without humor, but still Carlson's reaction was only that these men were neither yachtsmen nor gentlemen. "Fact is," the gray-eyed leader went on in a tone that he intended to be friendly, "we've got to get to Boston, see? I'll pay you whatever it costs and a couple of grand over when I'm within a hundred yards of T-wharf. Day or night makes no difference."

"But really!" began Carlson, trying to be polite.

"Out for fun, ain't you?" Thimble cut in. "Well, we ain't. This suitcase is full of dope. We were seen leaving St. John's with it, and the wires are hot about us. Every constable along the coast is looking for us, and a revenue cutter is after our boat. I ain't sorry the damn' thing is sinking, now you've come along."

"But I can't—"

"Fella, I'm tryin' to be right with you," said Thimble impatiently. "You see why I can't go to St. John's or let you drop me off in any of these hick towns along the coast, don't you? Your finding us was a break, see? We won't make you no trouble if you're right with us. No one is going to see us on your boat, or see us leaving it, if you do what I tell you. You got a right to go back to Boston, ain't you? No cutter is going to stop you. Well?"

The lips smiled, but the gray eyes were hard and watchful. Casually, indifferently, Thimble reached under his coat and showed the butt of a pistol. "Don't be dumb, fella!" he urged.

Carlson flushed. "What choice have I got? I've guests to consider," he answered stiffly, and walked to the forward cabin to put the Osprey on the course for Boston.

NONE of the gangsters followed him. To his relief, they seemed content to leave the running of the yacht in his hands, and lounged aft to the galley. Grace, instead of being terrified, was frankly thrilled, which annoyed Carlson exceedingly. He was seething with the impotent anger of the unarmed man. Frank T. Carlson, the accomplice of dope runners! A pretty picture he must present to his daughter and his future son-in-law, who had heard every word.

Bill Esterly, who came to join them after the engines were running at full speed, was in much the same frame of mind. His face and arms were streaked with oil, and his chin was set.

"I wish you'd go below, Grace," he said abruptly. "We may have a bad quarter of an hour up here. I'd stand for smuggling whisky, but dope is too much. That chap was so cocksure of

himself he got my goat. So I fixed him. I've dumped all the spare lubricating oil into the bilges and opened the drain cock on the engines. In a few miles the cylinders will overheat, and that's going to be that! We'll drift till we're picked up."

"Swell!" said Grace emphatically, but Carlson's eyes grew wide.

"Oh, I thought of all that, Frank," Bill said. "This is nothing but a business with them, and besides, they're rats. They can't possibly get away. Do you think they'll touch us, knowing they'll have to answer for it? Why, that kind won't even shoot from the front! It's safety first all the time. I wouldn't have trusted them a second while the yacht was O. K., but now—"

"I'd rather Grace went below. Just for a while," Carlson answered dubiously. Already he could smell the overheated engines, but though he was anxious, the habits of a lifetime assured him that Bill was right. No one would use violence unnecessarily. Certainly not.

The outcome, therefore, came like a nightmare from which the mercy of awakening was denied. Thimble stuck his head out of the galley and sniffed. Drawing his pistol, he made a jump for the engine room, to reappear almost instantly and walk toward Carlson and Bill. The older man he ignored.

"Smart, huh?" he snarled at Esterly. "Engines can't run without oil, huh? Laugh this off!"

The pistol barrel smacked against Bill's head. The young man dropped.

As Carlson stooped, the pistol was jabbed against his back. "Get him below and keep him from croaking," snarled Thimble. "No one's smart enough to pull a fast one on me—get that? I was willing to be right with you, but now I'm promising nothing.

Nothing, see?" He turned on his heel and walked aft.

Carlson picked up Esterly. He was breathing very slowly. There was a bad cut in the scalp over his ear. Carlson took him to Grace's room.

Father and daughter were calm, under the circumstances. Grace went white, and then set about bandaging the wound.

"I couldn't help it," Carlson said in extenuation.

"No."

"I think I'll go on deck to keep them from coming here. You'll lock the door?"

She looked at him evenly. "What for? Just make them angry in case they did want to come in?"

"We'll be picked up. He said there was a revenue cutter—"

"I heard him. Please go on deck, daddy. I don't want to talk. Go on deck and don't worry about me. Please! I'll be perfectly all right if you'll just let me alone."

So Carlson had gone up, crossed to the rail and gripped the top rope. The engines were no longer turning over; one of the men had seen that they would not run long, and had turned them off.

Thimble lounged in a wicker chair near the taffrail, indifferent to the fact that he might have killed a man unable to defend himself. The lee shore toward which the Osprey was drifting did not appear to worry him. He showed no excitement until the sloop was sighted, and that, as his instructions to Carlson proved, was occasioned by the opportunity for a get-away.

Carlson went back to his daughter's room and crossed to a porthole through which he could watch the approach of the sloop.

"There's a boat coming, Grace," he

announced bleakly. "No hope, though. They're nothing but fishermen."

DESPITE the rolling of the yacht and the high seas, Eli was tempted to steer the sloop directly alongside. It would be a trick. Quohaugh Inlet would have something more to talk about. "Eli Bascom, the crazy idjitt," the village would say, "took the sloop right alongside. Didn't more than scrape the yacht's paint, either, he didn't." They would pretend to condemn his recklessness, actually applauding his nerve.

Of course, if the maneuver failed the collision might start a leak in both boats. The salvage on this yacht might amount to as much as fifteen thousand dollars. Eli's share would set him up in business in Boston. When he had made enough to buy a big place like one of the summer people—Eli never doubted that he would be rich once he got a start—he would come back to the Inlet and hire John Keyo to take him fishing. For pleasure, by the hour. Eli never doubted that John would be there.

He looked up. The frown he knew so well was on John's face.

"I could take her alongside!" Eli remarked angrily.

"Guess ye could," said John with a studied indifference that grew out of a perfect understanding.

"We got to git every dollar they'll pay. Chance like this don't come twice," said Eli aggressively. "Might be smarter to heave-to till we've made them sign an agreement, eh? Then we kin surely collect. You leave me do the dickerin'. Come with me in the dory, and we'll leave old Uncle Davy here to tend ship till we git back."

The frown faded away.

"Just as ye like," said John. "They

ain't in position to dicker much, seems to me." He had no fear of being cheated, or of getting both boats to the Inlet with cracked planks, for that matter. In either case the less dramatic method would be surer in result, but to John, Eli's decision was of little consequence.

Aboard the yacht, on the contrary, Carlson uttered an exclamation of delight as the sloop hove to and put over a dory.

Where he had blundered, these fishermen might save themselves through the circumstance that their sloop would be out of pistol shot. All three of the fishermen could not be intimidated simultaneously; indeed, any show of violence would warn the old man whom Carlson could see aboard the sloop, would send him sailing after help from the shore.

Even Carlson was unaware quite how close the cliffs were behind the screen of the driving mist.

"They're leaving a man aboard!" he told his daughter.

"You're not going to try to warn them?" said the girl sharply.

Carlson's face fell. "No, Thimble told me he was going to pose as the owner and pass us off as his guests. He threatened me, and I don't quite dare—"

"I should think not!" said Grace.

"Ahoy!" Thimble called out from the deck above them. "Say, have you got any engine oil? You have? O. K., fella! Give us all you can spare. That's all we need!"

"What a break!" Grace whispered. Carlson groaned aloud. It was their nadir of despair, for to both the next speech from the deck brought encouragement out of all proportion to its content of information. The voice was self-confident, drawling, and sane—

calm and assured in a world that had turned topsy-turvy for the Carlsons.

"Ain't got but a pint to keep the wheel from squeakin'. That do ye?"

"A pint! Sa-ay, can the wisecracks, guy!"

"Oh—you don't want it, then, mister?"

"Shut up, Johnny, and leave me dicker!" cut in an irritable voice.

"We'll tow you to Quohaug Inlet, mister, if you'll sign an entry in the log that you're completely disabled."

"Where's that?"

"State of Maine. 'Bout west by north of here, if you want to be particular," came the drawling voice. "How about askin' us on board, mister?"

IN the cabin Grace rose impulsively, tucked a flying strand of ruddy brown hair under her beret, and glanced into the mirror. A dab with a compact and a swift, expert sweep with a little finger tipped with rouge satisfied her.

"I'm going on deck," she whispered. "I've got to see that man who drawls!"

"But, Grace!"

"But nothing, daddy! Fainting for females went out with Queen Victoria, and so did being the helpless prey for brutal males. I know my boy-friends. Really. Don't let them think we're scared. That's dumb."

"Don't do anything to give Thimble away—"

"He can say he's the Prince of Wales if he likes. Why shouldn't the owner's guests come on deck at such a thrilling moment?" said Grace determinedly. She flung back the door and was gone.

She was a small girl, a brunette that just missed being a red-head, and excitement heightened her color and

made her dark-brown eyes glow as she stepped out of the companionway. Like an old friend she smiled at Thimble, so that his scowl altered to a blank expression with an abruptness almost ludicrous, and his command to stay below changed in the act of utterance to a halting, "Oh—er—hello, Miss Carlson!"

Impersonally Grace surveyed the tall fisherman who faced Thimble on the deck of the Osprey. This handsome stranger was neither humorous, nor one to drawl. The man she sought was the stocky, red-faced giant who sat on the taffrail, an amused spectator of events.

Shorty lounged beside him like a terrier set to watch a St. Bernard. Frog was standing near the wheel house, watching all four of the men, but the broad-shouldered fisherman with the clear red skin seemed oblivious of the guardian and the lookout.

"Too bad you didn't have any oil," Grace said, seating herself in a deck chair near him.

"Ain't it?" John answered dryly. "The engineer has been tellin' me 'bout your accident. Too bad your friend was hurt."

Grace nodded. The knowledge of the nature of that "accident" made her part hard to play.

"Your intended, weren't he?"

"My—? Oh, I see! Yes, we were engaged." Her first impression was altering for the worse. These remarks were stupid and impolite. They belied the steady blue eyes which studied her an instant, and then glanced forward, where Thimble was facing the handsome fisherman.

"I didn't say I was disabled, and I won't stand for any shakedown by a hick judge in a hick town," Thimble retorted. "I've got to get to Boston."

So have my guests. Take me there and I'll pay anything fair."

"You'll go where I've a mind to take ye—considering the weather?" snapped Eli. "Boston! We couldn't tow ye there in a week, and as for leaving the price to the courts, that's more than fair—"

"It would be the Admiralty Court in Boston—judge is a city man," drawled John mildly.

"Shet up and leave me dicker!"

"Yeah-ah!" John grunted. He raised himself leisurely from the taffrail. "I'll just go and get the log book. Save time."

AS he moved, Shorty followed, walking a pace behind like a stalking cat. Thimble's face suddenly became stone.

Grace sat still, clenching her hands to keep from screaming. The log book was in the wheel house—where there was an enormous suitcase full of contraband, and blood stains on the carpet.

Steady and unhurried, John limped forward. As he reached the door Frog barred his way.

"Stop! Come here," Thimble called.

John turned. "Why, jest as ye say," he answered in mild surprise. "Maybe while you're dickerin' ye'd like me to take a look at the engines? I'm a dabster at it."

"No!" Thimble refused, and swung back to Eli. "I don't want to get hard," he apologized stiffly. "I'm thinking about my guests. How bad is this storm going to be?"

"Whole gale. I'm cal'latin' to be fair, too," snorted Eli, as angry as the other. "I ain't green, mister. Ye can dress this yacht up to look like a pleasure party, with a girl and all, but I

know a rum schooner supercargo when I see one."

"Then why offer to tow me in where I'll lose my cargo?" Thimble snarled.

John had limped back to his place at the taffrail.

"Guess he's got ye there, Eli," he drawled. "We couldn't transship the stuff in this sea, even if we was a mind to."

"Why not?" demanded Eli recklessly.

"I won't stand for it. Runnin' rum till we got our sloop paid for was all right, but we 'greed that once we owned her we'd quit."

"Will you shet up?"

"Don't cal'late to butt in. I jest had an idea," said John almost plaintively. He shifted on the taffrail to face Thimble. "Your cargo is lost anyway, mister," he pointed out. "There's no use, though, of you goin' to jail along with it. We can't tow ye to Boston, but we can sail ye there. You and all your guests can come on our sloop. Our deck hand, Uncle Davy, will take ye wherever ye please. Me and Eli will stay on board the yacht here. She'll wreck on the rocks, of course, but the two of us can pull away from the surf in a dory. Which eight or nine of us can't. If the constables or the Coast Guard find out what the yacht had in her hold, why, how did me and Eli know? We was jest turnin' an honest penny and tryin' to save life. You'll pay us for our risk, I guess?"

"Five thousand each," snapped Eli.

"No!" Grace cried out.

Thimble gave her an ugly look. "Well—O. K. with me," he muttered after a show of hesitation. Grace could see his face harden to mask the triumph he felt. "Yeah, that's O. K. Just wait till I get my suitcase. You can trust that Uncle Davy fella?"

"Guess so. Ain't afraid of being shipwrecked? Or be ye, Eli?" John challenged. He was no longer drawling. With a movement swift in so big a man he cast off the painter of the dory. "Ain't no time to waste," he commanded. "Jump in, miss, and I'll take ye to the sloop myself."

"Go with them, Shorty," Thimble snapped. The red-headed mechanic stepped over the rail instantly and waited for the dory to be brought below him. Grace, however, sprang back. This plan was appalling. She knew that Shorty was armed. Once aboard the sloop he would control it. Thimble would follow and sail away with them all.

"I won't!" she cried out. Thimble's face warned her, and she hesitated. "I mean—suppose the yacht isn't wrecked? We can't let these two fishermen get away with our cargo. Let them stand by us till we're almost ashore, anyhow!" John's eyes were on her.

She tried desperately to flash him a warning, but the stare of the blue eyes was disconcerting.

"Right rocky coast, miss," he objected. "I ought to take you first, but if you won't go—how about you, Red? You ready?"

"Take Frog along, too!" shouted Thimble.

JOHN was busy with the dory, but to Grace's consternation, he nodded.

What happened next was so sudden that her own actions were instinctive. The yacht was rolling like a log, the dory leaped and tumbled under the overhanging stern. Attempting to maneuver it, John slipped and lunged across the stern. His shoulder struck Shorty, hurling him overboard into the sea.

With a shout, John flung the painter into Grace's hands.

"Git us! He'll sink like a stone! I'm after him!" he yelled, and flinging off oilskin coat and rubber boots, vaulted over the rail straight down upon the man in the water, driving him from sight.

The painter tugged at Grace like a horse. She dared not let it go to snatch a lifebuoy, which was her first impulse. Thimble stood like one transfixed. Frog was far forward. Eli, first to recover himself, made a stride toward her, but to wait for him was to waste precious seconds. She leaped into the dory, all but capsizing it, and snatched up the oars.

She could row. She thought she could row well, but the breaking sea flung the dory around. Her strokes found now water, now air. The yacht was drifting downwind with startling speed. Her leap had taken the dory too far for Eli to reach her. He now hung over the stern, shouting at her. Thimble was beside him, shouting too. She couldn't hear what they said.

Lifted high, she saw John's blond head looking around for her. He was a good swimmer. His arm was under Shorty's throat, holding the red head well out of the water.

Certain that he was not in immediate danger, Grace paid more attention to her rowing and brought the boat alongside him. A huge bronzed hand caught the gunwale. "Jest hold the dory head to the sea and let the yacht drift away," he panted. "The sloop will see us and pick us up. Careful now, miss." He flung an Army pistol into the boat. Grace could see his face when the dory went over the crest of a wave. He was smiling. "Figgered ye didn't understand, and that Eli'd come after me," he said.

"This is just as well. Eli won't know what to make of it. He'll 'bout choke when he finds I outsmarted him." The smile became a grin.

"Understand?" Grace panted, laboring at the oars.

"'Bout w o m e n goin' first. Who were those fellers?"

"Dope runners. We picked them up when their motor boat was sinking, and they—struck Bill. But how did you guess—"

He grunted.

"Have they drifted out of pistol shot? Yes? Then hold this feller while I climb aboard."

Grace obeyed, and John rolled his great bulk over the stern of the dory, scarcely shipping a bucket of water. He lifted in the unconscious Shorty, and then relieved Grace at the oars.

"**H**OW'D I guess what was up?" he said, rowing with short, jerky strokes that sent the dory leaping toward the sloop. "Why, me and Eli sized that gray-eyed feller up soon's we laid eyes on him. Eli stopped there, but when you came topside, I didn't."

"But why? I might have been with them—your friend thought so."

"Eli likes to talk so much he don't trouble to listen. All girls look alike, but they don't talk alike. Best way to tell the lady of the house from the cook is to shet your eyes. Learned that deliverin' fish to the summer people. Soon's you said, 'Sorry you hadn't any oil,' I was sure you were no rum runner's sweetie. So I prowled around. Well, everything was wrong, anyhow. When a boat's helpless, every one that can move comes on deck when another vessel comes alongside. Yet there was a gray-haired man went below."

"My father."

"Then when I asked if your friend was in an accident, your eye flashed, but your lip shook when I asked if he was your *fiancé*. That weren't right. An iron suitcase sitting right alongside a compass is plenty wrong, and anybody with engine trouble is mighty glad to have some one that allows to know look over their engines."

"For a rum runner to be willing to abandon a cargo is a dead give-away, but by that time I was figgerin' how to git one of them alone with me so I could hit him without bein' hit back by the others."

"And I thought you were stupid and crooked!" Grace exclaimed. "But didn't you take a chance? Suppose I had been their girl friend?"

"Why, no harm would have been done that I see," John answered with an air of stolidity which Grace was beginning to distrust. "I ain't taken a chance yet, really, but I'm gittin' in the mind to."

"But aren't we all right now? We can go ashore and get help."

"Yacht would be on the rocks before we could get back from the Inlet. We'll have to take them in tow. What is wrong with them engines?"

When she explained he shook his head gravely. "They'll have cooled—and they can be run again for a spell," he remarked.

IN view of the fact that John expected the gangsters to take the offensive, he paid little attention to the pistol in the bottom of the dory. As they came alongside the fishing sloop he lifted the limp figure of Shorty into the hands of a white-bearded man who must have been seventy, but whose activity and strength were those of a boy.

While helping Grace out, John ex-

plained the situation to Uncle Davy, and then aided him to hoist the dory aboard without even picking the pistol up.

They tied and gagged Shorty and carried him below. They put a double reef in the mainsail and brought up a coil of huge rope. Then they got under way. John did not even ask for the details of the capture of the Osprey, or suggest that Grace go below as the sloop drew near the yacht. He took the wheel himself—a perfect target, for the sloop passed within thirty feet of the drifting vessel. Thimble and Frog were displaying their weapons openly, but neither attempted to shoot at the sloop.

At the nearest point of approach Uncle Davy tossed a heaving line aboard the yacht, and Eli, who had been sitting aft, jumped to retrieve it. It was he who hauled the towline to the yacht and secured it after John had hove to, and when the line was secured and the sloop had gotten under way before the wind, he walked aft toward the gangsters. Mr. Carlson appeared from below, waved to Grace, and joined the others. There was a spring in his step and renewed confidence in his bearing.

"I don't see why you couldn't have done this in the first place," Grace objected.

"If we had, you could have paid us about what you was a mind to for the tow," John objected gravely. "You seem kind of disappointed like."

"It's the reaction from the excitement. Everything is so matter of fact now. If I didn't know daddy was in danger and there were rocks over there, I'd believe we were towing a barge down the Hudson on a rainy day . . . Aren't you going to get that pistol?"

"Never shot one in my life. Guess any of them could beat me at that game. Sounds kind of grand, banging away to protect a pretty girl, but if ye can't hit nothin'—"

"So you think I'm pretty?"

"Yes, miss, I certainly do," he answered earnestly.

"Call me Grace," she said, and smiled. That won her a nod of thanks. John grinned back, but his eyes were grave.

"Fact is, I'm scared, Grace," he said. "On account of Eli, I mean. See—he's on his feet! I'm scared he'll try to jump them."

"When they've pistols in their hands?"

"That won't bother Eli a mite. Would spur him on, like as not."

"Bill wasn't afraid, either," said Grace proudly. "You're fond of Eli, aren't you?"

Uncle Davy gave her a queer look and craned his head toward John.

"RIGHT fond of him," said the latter. "We're kind of like the hammer and the anvil. They git along best together, too." He was looking at the yacht. A frown which Grace could not interpret was on the broad red face. "I'm the anvil," he said.

"That used to plague me once. Guess I was sixteen when a teacher in school told me that when a hammer strikes it gits just as much of a shock as the anvil does. And is more apt to git heated up if it keeps on a beatin'. I ain't never forgot that."

"By time!" Uncle Davy ejaculated so vehemently that Grace understood that this reminiscence had a significance hidden from her.

"Eli's figgered all these years he was doin' all the strikin', but I 'low

"I've been hittin' back," John drawled. "This here is goin' to settle things, once and for all."

"Why?" asked Grace.

"Because fishin' is too slow for Eli. He's been hankerin' to go to Miquelon and take out a run schooner. He wants to have as much money as the folks that come here in summer. Well, so do I, but I want it the same way they get theirs—out of a business."

"We're icin' our catch and sendin' it to Boston. Pretty soon I'll stop goin' to sea and buy fish all along the coast. But Eli says that will take years to amount to somethin'. Which it will. He likes to make money quick. He ain't afraid of nothin', and he likes risk. Doin' things that others don't dare to and being pointed out for it goes to his head."

"Daddy is going below," said Grace. "I wonder why? I—excuse me, I was listening. But what if Eli does like risks and quick money? So do lots of people."

"Folks like that gray-eyed feller on the yacht, for instance," said John dryly.

"Him and Eli are cut from the same cloth. There'll be a lot of money in gettin' that suitcase to Boston, and the job will be easier if Eli helps. Without Eli they might not be able to sail the sloop at all, and they'll need a man that's known to be an owner of his boat in case they're stopped. It will be a good bargain for them both. I'm scared. Eli will figure it's the chance he's been frettin' for. I know him, miss. He'll fight 'em or join 'em—quick."

"He's getting up, now."

"He's a goin' to semaphore to me," said John as the other began to wave both arms over his head. "He's joined 'em, miss. I'd—I'd most rather he was

shot. We've been together twenty years."

TO Grace the gesticulations from the bow of the yacht, some two hundred and fifty feet astern, were meaningless, but John translated steadily.

"He says they are going to run alongside of us and jump on board. If I put up a fight they'll shoot." John stopped. "If I cut the towrope, could we outsail them? What speed will the yacht make?"

"Fifteen knots an hour if it runs right."

"It will run all right for a mile or two. Guess they can get alongside," John drawled thoughtfully. "Wait! He's signalin' some more. Says they've promised him fifteen thousand dollars, and that they've been making these trips for a year, so there'll be no trouble in Boston. They've talked him around, right enough. He says if anybody is shot, he's afraid they might shoot us all. Says for me not to be a fool."

"They might, too. If you had seen Bill's head—" said Grace with a shudder.

"They wouldn't dast hurt anybody here."

"Bill said that!" Grace expostulated.

"You're not going to fight!"

Instead of answering, John began to wave his arms in a semaphore.

"I've told them to give me a minute to think it over," he said when he finished. His eyes roved over the sloop. "They'll come alongside to windward, on our port quarter," he muttered. "Put your helm down a mite, Davy."

"Ye'll risk jibin' her!" protested the old man.

"Please do what they want—my father and Bill are aboard!" Grace cried out, only to flush before John's

level glance. "I know Eli's your friend, and I wouldn't want to give in either, but—please!"

"Ye can throw the gun overboard if ye like," John answered. "I'm only riskin' myself, and seems like this is worth it."

Silently she interrogated the old man. Uncle Davy shrugged, as much at a loss as the girl as to what was intended.

"I'm goin' to signal that when they come alongside and board I'll give in!" John exclaimed. "That's fair, ain't it? Keep the wind dead aft, Davy."

"Yes, that's fair," the girl whispered.

The message finished, John walked forward. His preparations were strange, and as far as Grace could judge by the frown on Uncle Davy's face, puzzling even to that seaman. John took a watch tackle—a loop of rope with a block at each end. One block he secured to the bow of the ship, and about three feet above the deck. The other end he made fast to a ring-bolt near the stern rail. The two ropes he separated through the full length of the sloop, placing one down the center and the other over by the port rail. The tackle covered the whole port side of the sloop like a loose, elongated O. Rather like a noose it was.

The engines in the Osprey had been started before this was finished. A frown of vehement protest creased John's face.

"Longsplice the lead of the tackle into the main sheet about halfway down and cut the sheet off," he snapped at Davy. "Give me the wheel. You've got a couple of minutes. You go below!" he ordered Grace.

At the order to join the tackle with the sheet a grin of comprehension had flashed across Davy's face.

"I want to see!" Grace demurred.

"Then git into the companionway where you won't get hurt!" John's eyes were on the yacht. It was gaining, and rapidly. Davy's wrinkled fingers flew. His knife flashed as the two ropes were joined, and at once he scrambled down the companionway beside Grace.

"Keep your head low!" he whispered. "By time, I never heard tell of such a thing! Hell's a gittin' ready to pop!"

JOHN motioned for silence, for the yacht was plunging alongside close to the sloop. Side by side on the bow stood Thimble and Frog with drawn guns, while Eli, at the wheel, leaned far out to study the sloop. Thimble raised his gun.

"Don't shoot!" Eli yelled. "I'm like to ram her if he changes course! Jump when I git alongside, and look out for that boom. 'Twill brain ye if it swings across the deck!"

"Eli's smart as a whip, drat him!" whispered Uncle Davy. "Hope they won't have nerve to jump! Takes nerve, and plenty of it. Look at Eli handle her, will ye? Hi! Watch John steer! Chalk line ain't no straighter!"

The bow of the yacht crept into the restricted field of vision afforded from the companionway, came even with the stern of the sloop, and edged forward and inward. The sloop trembled to the impact of the hulls, but so skillfully were both ships handled that Grace distinctly heard the double thump as the two gunmen leaped on the deck of the sloop.

At the sound the wheel spun under John's hand, and he cast loose the mainsheet. There was a terrific crash and snapping of cordage as the boom swung outboard, but first, at the very

start of that sweep, the loose ropes of the watch tackle lifted from the deck. The O became a double bar, with the two ropes side by side. For an instant they were stiff as iron rods, and then, as the lashing holding the forward blocks parted, the whole tackle seemed to spring aft, one rope whizzing through the block under the pull of the boom. Then came the crash as the boom struck the backstays.

John vaulted over the wheel and ran forward. Grace and Davy, scrambling from the companionway, found him picking up an automatic pistol. The two gangsters lay in a heap, Thimble totally unconscious, Frog dazed. The tackle had snapped tight around their ankles, jerked their feet from beneath them and thrown them aside. They lay tangled in the coils.

John tied Frog swiftly. Thimble he neglected, for the sloop had fallen into the trough and the swinging boom was threatening to take the mast out of her with every jerk. Davy cast off the jib, which permitted her bow to come into the wind. John captured the end of the sheet and, watching his chance, caught a turn.

The backstays were dangling and the mast rocked in its partners, but the sloop was hove to.

"Come alongside again!" John shouted at the yacht, and bent to examine his prisoners. "Their legs are rope cut pretty bad, but no bones are broken," he reported after a moment.

"Where'd ye have been if the jerk had snapped the tackle?" yelled Davy.

"Why, I'd have surrendered before they could have shot me. They were bound to trip. The chance I took was that both of them wouldn't jump," John said, so soberly that Grace began to laugh hysterically. Though he tried

to silence her by a look, he failed until he put a brotherly arm around her shoulders. The firm grip steadied her. It was not an affectionate embrace. She almost wished it were—but she knew he was not the man to trespass on another man's claim.

"The anvil—hit the hammer—this time," she gasped, hardly able yet to control the laughter that racked her.

"Aye, aye," he soothed. "Stop it, if ye can . . . The sloop's still able to tow the yacht to harbor. You're all right now—but I need your help mighty bad."

"You?" Grace gasped.

John nodded, utterly serious. "I want you to promise that you won't tell anybody what I told you about Eli," he pleaded. "I want you to keep your father and sweetheart from talking, too. Davy 'll keep his mouth shut, but if the whole truth of this gets out Eli will have to leave Quohaug Inlet. He couldn't stand to have it known I'd beaten those fellers after he'd given up and joined them."

"Won't he leave—anyway?"

"Not if I can help it. He'd jest turn crook out of pride. If you promise, I can tell Quohaug Inlet their guns were pointed at him to make him steer the yacht alongside us. It 'll be worth doin', and a favor to me."

In the sunburned face the blue eyes were steady and deep as the sea on a clear June day.

"I promise," Grace whispered. No one could have refused that much to a man so serene, so unself-centered, that he would forego personal triumph to save the face of a rival. The capture of the dope runners and the salvage of the yacht were small matters to this man in comparison to the rescue of his friend.

THE END.



O'Connor laughed as he lunged

Solomon's Caves

Was he madman or magician, this mysterious chieftain of the African desert who ruled the treasure caves that fighting Terrence O'Connor and the wily cockney, John Solomon, sought to penetrate?

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "John Solomon's Biggest Game," "The Coral of Idris," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TERRENCE O'CONNOR, fighting Irish ex-soldier, was ready to head an armored car expedition into the African desert south of Tunis when he quarreled with one of the financial backers, Count Philippe Delisle, and bashed the wealthy Frenchman in the jaw. O'Connor, about to be arrested in the street shortly afterward, is rescued by a nondescript little cockney, John Solomon,

who knows the expedition's plans. Refusing to explain his interest in the affair, he urges O'Connor to proceed. The two of them, accompanied by Janet Carson, daughter of a scientist who was to have made the trip, and by three faithful assistants, Sergeant Larache, ex-Legionnaire; Joulak, an Algerian, and Palissy, a one-eyed rascal from Paris, reach the Golden Well, in the uncharted mountain country.

This story began in the *Argosy* for August 15.

It is here, according to a map and manuscript uncovered by O'Connor, that a fabulous treasure has been concealed for hundreds of years in a cave. O'Connor, on night watch, is accosted by a helmeted figure in coat of mail who calls himself the Emir Al Mansur and tells O'Connor he has been alive for many centuries. Magic forces, unseen hands, seem to obey his every command. As a gesture of his power, the emir has invisible hands strangle O'Connor. The latter fights back, but is powerless, nor can he see any physical being near him except Al Mansur, who laughingly commands the spirits to desist.

O'Connor goes with him into a gorgeously decorated series of caves in the near-by hill, where he sees ancient books of great value, but no treasure. The emir offers him some of the books if he will depart. Later, O'Connor gains his freedom, but cannot find his way out of the caves. He sees Palissy brought in as a captive.

O'Connor discovers that all of the occupants of the caves are not "unbodied." There are numerous guards, dressed after the fashion of the emir. As various of these guards try to take his life, the Irishman cuts them down with the blade of Damascus steel he finds in one of the rooms. He finally gets back to his friends, after discovering a caravan of Arabs, crazed with hashish, in a near-by declivity.

CHAPTER VIII.

AL MANSUR'S SECRET.

IT was rapidly approaching sunset. Joulak had gone up the steep climb to the unseen path above bearing food for himself and Larache, and orders to await word from O'Connor.

The latter, after a draught of cold water from the Golden Well, had talked long and rapidly, while Solomon puffed at his clay pipe with emotionless countenance, and Janet Carson listened, wide-eyed. In proof of his story of what had happened to him, O'Connor displayed the splendid gold-inlaid helmet with its heron's feather, and the beautiful blade, which Solomon now held across his knees. He omitted nothing of what he had seen and experienced.

"And now, Janet, will ye be getting that grub Joulak left ready?" he concluded. "Like a good girl! Faith, I'm tired as the divil. Did Al Mansur send ye out the bale of manuscripts?"

"No," she responded, rising. "Palissy was off scouting. We heard several shots, but the sergeant could find no trace of him. So he's safe enough, eh?"

"Probably drunk by now," and O'Connor laughed.

In a moment she was back with a cloth, which she spread on the sand, and plates; the simple supper of stew and bread was quickly before them.

"This 'ere sword," observed Solomon, "was made in Damascus nine 'undred year back, and no mistake neither. Emeralds in the 'andle. Well, sir, you've got something there!"

"Aye," said O'Connor. "And we've got to make plans here and now, John. With Larache up there, we have an entry to the cavern—if we want it." His keen, eager features tightened with grave decision. "Make no mistake, you two; this is no child's play! We're up against a pack of madmen, for one thing, with a leader who may be either mad or sane. And how many of these fanatic guards he has, I've no idea. I'd like to send Janet back with the first car to Fort

Aumale, but it'd be devilish unsafe for her to try it alone, and we can't spare a man if—"

"Enough of that, Terrence," she cut in swiftly, her eyes ablaze. "I don't know what John will decide, but I'll speak for myself right now. This thing is horrible, incredible, ghastly! I'm not backing out of it; and I can use a weapon myself, remember. It's our duty to step in and wipe out these loathsome creatures if we can do it."

O'Connor's brows went up quizzically. "You? Shoot to kill?" he said.

"Absolutely," she rejoined calmly. "These things aren't men; they're beasts, worse than beasts! Killing them means no more than killing snakes."

"Well, John?" O'Connor faced the pudgy little man. "You've got the clearest head of us all; I'll leave it up to you. If we didn't have this passage that gives us a clear way right into the heart of things, I'd say it was rankly beyond our abilities; but as it is, we have a fighting chance to clean up the place. You make the decision, however. Remember, it'll be a stiff job."

Solomon took the old clay pipe from his mouth.

"I says yes, just like that," he said.

THEY were both startled by the swiftness of his response, and its assurance. He knocked out his pipe, sighed wheezily, and continued.

"It's like this, sir and miss; we 'ave the chance we won't never 'ave again," he said. "As for danger, that's neither 'ere nor there. Life's just one danged danger after another, if we only knew it, as the old gent said when 'e took 'is third. It's like you say, miss; this 'ere is a pack o' wild beasts, and a werry good job it is if they're wiped out. But we 'ave to do it quick, afore Delisle gets 'ere with 'is caravan."

"You think he's on the way?" asked Janet. Solomon nodded, and applied himself to his meal.

"Then that's settled," said O'Connor. "I'll have to have an hour of rest; to tell the truth, I'm about done up—must be getting soft."

"No, sir," said Solomon. "It's that 'ere sherbet you ate. It's 'ad hashish in it, most like. Now, what are you after in this 'ere place? What I want, is to see the whole danged thing wiped out, just like that. You, sir?"

O'Connor laughed. "Why, that as much as anything. And loot, if I can pick up some."

"I'm not altruistic either," said Janet Carson, a trifle bitterly. "What we hoped to find here, we'll never see, of course. But there are manuscripts. Those are my loot."

"You'll get 'em," said Solomon, looking blankly from one to the other.

"See here," cut in O'Connor. "What's your idea about all this magic and so forth? About his yarn regarding the well, and the disembodied ones, and so forth? I tell you, those invisible fingers were real as the devil!"

"I 'as me own notions, sir," said Solomon placidly. "But it's werry 'ard to make sure. I'd say it was about 'alf and 'alf."

"Half and half what?" demanded Janet.

"About 'alf real and 'alf not. It's werry easy to be mistook in your judgment, as the old gent said when 'e found the butler a-kissing of the 'ousemaid." Solomon fished in some hidden pocket and produced a little red morocco notebook. He began to turn the pages, and O'Connor caught sight of that same very neat, small writing.

"What's that, John?"

"Me accounts, sir. I try to keep me

accounts all shipshape. This 'ere is an old account book I fetched along, and it's been a mortal long time open, too."

"Accounts?" said O'Connor amusedly. "With whom?"

"With a gent by the name o'Skoboloff, sir. Prince Ivan Skoboloff, 'e used to be, and a werry interesting man, too. Slipped out of me 'ands, 'e did, when I 'ad 'im nipped, and that was a long time back. I knowed 'im in Egypt," went on Solomon, laying aside the notebook and taking out his knife and plug. "A great student, 'e was; of oriental magic and such like, and werry rich afore the revolution lost 'im everything. I've seen 'im mesmerize a whole crowd in the street, just like that, but 'e was a bit balmy all the same."

"Hypnotist! I never thought of that," said O'Connor, with a low whistle. "And you think he's our Emir Al Mansur, do you? But there are things—"

"I know, sir," interrupted Solomon. "It's like a sick man as can't be diagnosed by the doctors; you 'ave one symptom 'ere, and another one that knocks it all of a 'eap and disproves it. Well, sir, if I was you I'd start in to slap 'ot bullets right into 'im and any of 'is ruddy gang you meet, and the quicker the better, says I. Sorry I am to say it, but I can't climb that 'ere 'ill. I'll 'ave to stop 'ere and watch the cars."

"Eh?" said O'Connor quickly, though he perceived that Solomon was right. "But you'd not be safe here, John—"

"Safer than I would up yonder, most like," and Solomon chuckled. "You get your bit o' sleep, sir. It's a growing dark now, and I 'ave a bit o' work to do yet."

There was a low whistle from up above. It was hard to see anything,

for now it was indeed growing dark, the sun having dropped from sight while they talked.

"That you, Joulak?" called O'Connor.

"Yes, my captain. One man. Larache got him."

"Good. Find the way down now, before it's entirely dark, and be ready to guide us back up to the path in an hour."

O'Connor rolled up without another word, and fell into a sound sleep almost at once.

HE wakened in an hour, automatically, with the old campaign trick of setting his brain to wake him like an alarm clock. For a little he lay quiet. All was dark; the moon would not be up for some time. He caught a whiff of Solomon's tobacco-smoke, heard a low voice.

Something had come into his mind as he wakened, perhaps induced subconsciously. Solomon had brought the little red notebook—why? Not by chance, certainly. He reviewed their first meeting; that was chance, most surely—yet was it wholly chance? Solomon was in Algiers to meet Professor Carson, and that was assuredly not chance at all, but inside information of some sort. And the perfection with which everything had moved for Solomon—

"Faith, I'm beginning to smell a rat in all this!" murmured O'Connor, and sat up. In the starlight, he could see Solomon and Janet Carson sitting to one side, talking. He rose and sauntered over to them.

"Will ye tell me one thing, John?" he said abruptly. "How much of all this did ye know or suspect from the start, eh? Out with it, now."

Solomon chuckled wheezily. "Them as asks questions gets less'n they asks,

I says—just like that, sir! If I was you, I'd look ahead and not back. It don't never pay to look back, as the old gent said when 'e buried 'is third."

"So!" O'Connor laughed softly. "You're a strange man, John, and you have your own way of doing things, eh? Do you expect Delisle to come here?"

"Yes, sir, and before werry long, too."

"Let me draw one thing to your notice—that caravan I saw in the valley. There's some way here, some other caravan track, that we didn't find."

"I expect as 'ow there's 'alf a dozen, sir," said the placid, wheezy voice. "This 'ere place is in touch wi' Tunis, Tripoli and the Libyan country, mind. And if I was you, sir, I'd look around in them 'ere caves for a radio room."

"Good idea," said O'Connor. "Undoubtedly there is one. Has it struck you that there's nothing to prevent this gang from using airplanes? Delisle might use one to get here."

"Right you are, sir."

Joulak appeared, and saluted.

"All ready, cap'n. I can lead you up to the path. I've dismounted one of the machine rifles; if you can manage a couple of the drums we'll make it."

"Good," said O'Connor. "Two pistols each, and spare clips. Is that armor ready for me up above?"

"Yes, my captain."

Joulak went to the cars.

"If we only had a dozen or so grenades, now," said O'Connor, "it'd be grand!"

Solomon moved, started to speak, and checked himself. Janet rose.

"I've one pistol, Terrence, and that's enough. Spare clips, too. Well, John, we'll say good-by and good luck—"

"To arms!" It was Joulak's voice,

low and piercing. "Some one moving up the ravine!"

O'CONNOR darted to the car and snatched out a rifle. Listening, he could hear a click of stones; then came a voice, cursing.

"Ha! That *salopard* Palissy!" grunted Joulak. Almost at once, Palissy called to them.

"*Hola*, comrades! I'm alone. Don't shoot. Are you there?"

"Come ahead," rejoined O'Connor, and heard a surprised path.

"He's drunk," said Joulak confidently. "He always swears in Arabic when he's drunk—"

The vague shape of a man appeared, emerging from the little ravine to the right of the fork. Evidently Palissy had come from the same cavern entrance where O'Connor had entered; therefore he had been sent out by the emir.

Striding along unsteadily, he presently came to the cars and sat down.

"*Pouf!* That's strong liquor they have in there!" he exclaimed. "Thought I'd never find the cursed path. So you're here, captain? They're hunting you like dogs in there. Saw that girl, did you? *Diantre!* She's a girl for you! If Joulak ever got in that place—"

"Shut up your drunken talk!" snapped O'Connor angrily. "Get to business."

"Right, *mon capitaine!* Well, I'm serving this accursed Al Mansur now. I've got a pocket filled with gold pieces here somewhere — Napoleons, real ones! You understand, captain—"

"I understand," said O'Connor. "Get on with it. They let you out?"

"Yes. I'm drunk, as you might suspect. Half a dozen of them are waiting back there, up the ravine; with

rifles. Al Mansur thought he had hypnotized me; but what the devil! I've seen that trick worked before now. You can't hypnotize a man who's drunk. *Kif* works just the other way. Take hashish, and you're an easy victim. I drank so much liquor that the hashish they gave me didn't work, and I spilled most of it anyhow. My shirt's all green inside with the cursed stuff—"

O'Connor groaned. "Confound your tongue! What are you here for?"

"To see if you're here, to trap every one else, and to return like a dumb sheep. I'm to persuade you that O'Connor is safe and will return to-morrow. I was in the radio room, and the emir was trying to receive a message, but something was wrong with the apparatus. He doesn't want to wipe you all out until to-morrow night, for some reason. He hasn't many men here; from something he said, I think most of them went to El Agurt to meet Delisle and join the caravan there."

"Ah! Now we're getting somewhere!" exclaimed Janet eagerly. "You were right about the radio, John!"

"Joulak, you son of the devil, gimme a cigarette," said Palissy. "Thanks. Trust me, captain, I've fooled them. Aye! I've had *kif* in my brain long ago; I'm an old hand at that work. Drown it with plenty of liquor that's my motto. I'd better be getting back to that girl, too—"

"Wake up!" snapped O'Connor. "Listen to me. Don't go back in there unless you're sure you can play the game."

"Trust me," and Palissy laughed. "I can be more useful there than here."

"Correct. Go back and say nothing's been heard from me, but the others are here. They will remain

camped, hunting for you and me both. Understand? Let on as if you'd fooled them completely. Here, take this pistol and shove it out of sight."

"Understood," said Palissy.

"Can you tell me where that radio room is?"

"What the devil! I'm no human map. It's somewhere close to my own room, where the girl is waiting for me to get back. That's all I know."

"Get back, then, and play your part. If you hear any shooting, watch your chance to join us."

"Eh?" said Palissy. "You can get back in?"

"Never mind about that; I'm taking no chances on your brain being picked by that rogue. Get in your head what I've told you, and stick to it. I'm not here and haven't been seen."

"Right." Palissy came to his feet, none too steadily. "He thinks you're doped and have fallen asleep in some nook or corner. Eh, Joulak! If you had a glimpse of the girls in there, you'd fight like the devil to change places with me! Where's that old rascal Larache?"

"None of your business," said O'Connor. "Get going."

Palissy saluted and disappeared.

"What do you think of it, John?" said O'Connor.

"You 'andled it properly, sir," Solomon said promptly.

"Not afraid to stop here alone?"

"Not me, sir. I 'ave the other automatic rifle if so be as I needs it."

"Then—luck to you. Joulak!"

THEY shook hands with Solomon, and a moment later struck off into the darkness after Joulak. O'Connor had the electric torch he had found in the passage, and Janet carried another and larger one. Each

of them carried one of the heavy cartridge drums, while Joulak bore the rifle. O'Connor had slung the naked scimitar about his neck on a thong.

To reach the ledge above was no easy matter. As they climbed, O'Connor chuckled at thought of Palissy. The one-eyed scoundrel had plunged into his part with an enthusiasm that stopped at nothing, enjoying all the sensual gratifications of Al Mansur's earthly paradise, but craftily side-stepping its dangers. Not idly had Terrence O'Connor picked his men.

With a final heave and scramble they were somehow up on the path, where they set down their burdens. O'Connor's light picked up the huddled corpse of Fortesque, and clicked off again. Joulak located the mailed shirt, which reached to the hips, and he got it over his head.

"All ready?" he exclaimed. "No lights; they might be seen. I'll lead. Afraid, Janet?"

"Of what?" came her cool voice.

O'Connor laughed and reached for her hand; he felt a quick, firm pressure as her fingers clasped on his. Something passed between them, wordless, ecstatic. It came to him suddenly, like a flash, what a comrade she was, what a quiet, dependable, poised character was here at his side; no loud chatter, useless words, amazed exclamations, but a quiet tenderness cloaked by her efficiency. His fingers tightened on hers—then he strode out and was making his way along the path in the starlight.

Presently he came to the ledge, the other two following him carefully. There was no sign of Sergeant Larache. He strode along until he could discern the dark opening against the darker cliff, then he took a look over the edge, and made out the glimmer of a fire down below, and the grunt and

champ of camels. The caravan was still there.

"*On ne passe pas!*" came the low voice of Larache.

"All right, sergeant."

Larache emerged from the shadows. He laughed a little.

"I took you for one of 'em, captain. A relief showed up; I got him."

"Take his mail shirt, if you like," said O'Connor softly. "We're going in; and it won't ward off bullets, but may come in handy."

Larache assented and disappeared. O'Connor found the corpse of the man he had killed, and retrieved the helmet. As the other two came up, Larache emerged again, struggling to get into the linked shirt. Joulak set down the automatic rifle and panted out a low jeer.

"Hello, legionnaire! The tin-soldier legion, eh? You'll wish you didn't have that thing on when we get in, if Palissy told the truth about the girls and liquor!"

"Eh? Where is Palissy?" said the sergeant.

"Inside, drunk as a lord. Here's an extra pistol I brought you. Then you can carry this cursed automatic rifle. I'll take the drums."

"Fair enough," said O'Connor. "Ready, sergeant? Janet, you bring up the rear. No more talk, men."

He plunged into the passage, sending a thin pencil of light ahead.

CHAPTER IX.

TRAPPED!

O'CONNOR had but one plan: to come upon Al Mansur as soon as might be, and test out his boasted invulnerability.

He no longer feared the invisible

hands, now that he suspected what he had to fight against in them. Solomon had hinted at the truth, even Palissy had guessed it—probably after his one experience of the unbodied ones, which O'Connor had witnessed.

"Some form of hypnotism, right enough," concluded O'Connor. "That devil suggests the idea, if any one faces him as I did; the subject feels the hands, believes they are there, gets panicky, and fights with his muscles instead of with his brain. He's fighting himself all the time—clever, that! I don't wonder this fellow Skoboloff could set himself up as a king among these Arabs. His natural abilities, his unscrupulous cruelty, and a bit of ventriloquism could go far. What an inhuman devil he must be!"

He thought of the girl Miriam and her eyes, of the madman in the rocky bowl, of the huge blacks he had seen; and a flame danced in his brain. Undoubtedly, too, Fortesque had not been the only renegade in this outfit. Skoboloff might well dream of setting himself up here just as the Senussi had done over eastward in the Libyan desert. With Delisle and the dope syndicate behind him, he had little to fear so far as the French were concerned—or had he? Was it possible that Solomon—

"Devil take it, what a blind fool I am!" thought O'Connor angrily. "That explains everything, of course. He evaded the issue very neatly, but it looks clear enough now. He's working on this job for the government—no wonder he had a letter in his pocket that made the police blink hard and quit! And not a soul guessed he was anything but a wheezy little old cockney; nobody would guess it. That's exactly how he could get away with it!"

Something of the genius that must

be Solomon's unfolded itself before his mind's eye, in a swift but fleeting glimpse. Almost at the same instant his physical eye caught a gleam of light ahead, and he snapped off his torch. Barely in time, too. A lantern came bobbing around a turn of the passage. The bearer held it up high, and O'Connor caught a glitter of chain mail. He reached back and touched Larache, who was close behind.

"Halt; I'll take him."

Flash light in his left hand, curved blade in his right, O'Connor strode forward with no attempt at concealment. The guard was alone, and as he heard the steps and peered ahead, O'Connor switched on his light and flung the ray directly into his face, half blinding him. The light showed a shaven face, thin and wolfish, snarling at the light.

"Is that you, cap'n?" came a voice in English, echoing and reverberating along the narrow passage. O'Connor was startled, until he recollected that this must be another renegade.

"Yes. What is it?" he demanded, purposely lifting his voice so that the booming echoes would distort it in the other's ears.

"Switch off that damned light, will you?" came the response. "Al Mansur wants to know why in the devil you haven't returned. You'd better get back in a hurry. There's no sign of that Irishman anywhere."

"Tell Al Mansur that I killed him. I'll be along and report as soon as I get a wound in my arm tied up."

Plainly, the other suspected nothing amiss from the reverberating voice, and must have caught the gleam of O'Connor's mail shirt despite the blinding ray. He turned, barely ten feet distant.

"Yah!" came his jeering response. "Going in to have a word with your

girl and smoke a pipe first, are you? Better shake a leg, or there'll be another cap'n of the guard. Al Mansur is in a damned bad humor—"

"Give him my message, blast you!" thundered O'Connor, and the other departed at a run. Chuckling, the Irishman turned to his companions. His voice cut at them softly but sharply.

"Follow on with your light. I'll wait for you."

HE departed hastily after the renegade, whose shuffling footsteps filled the little corridor with sounds that drowned out all else. He caught sight of the lantern bobbing ahead and slowed his pace. Despite the temptation to get this scoundrel out of the way, it was better to let him go on with the message and appease the anxiety of Al Mansur on two heads. Search for O'Connor would then be halted, too.

A twist of the passage, and light showed ahead, the running figure of the guard briefly illumined by it. That was the barred opening, of course; O'Connor halted, kept his eye on the bobbing lantern. The door there swung open, the guard again lighted up by the lamps in the outer corridor—then his figure was gone.

Coming to the opening, O'Connor halted, peered into that chamber where he had seen Al Mansur talking with Palissy. At first he thought it empty; then he saw that two of the half-naked blacks were at work, letting down the lamps on their chains and refilling them with oil. O'Connor held up his hand warningly, as his three companions approached down the inclined passage. One of the blacks was speaking in an Arabic dialect.

"Move faster with those lamps, imbecile! The master has ordered us to

the Red Chamber to question the Frenchman—"

"Time enough to start him screaming," responded the other dully. "First orders come first. Give me the oil."

O'Connor beckoned as the others paused, drew back from the opening, and passed on. When he came to the door in the end of the passage, he halted.

"So!" growled Larache grimly to Joulak. "You, and your talk of girls and liquor! Le Borgne won't be having so much fun, if those black devils spoke truth."

"Bah! The one-eyed can take care of himself," said Joulak. "He's no baby—"

"Cut out the talk," ordered O'Connor. "Don't start shooting unless we must, for they have some alarm signal that sounds through all the caverns. Ready!"

He flung open the door and found himself again at the end of the other passage leading out to the hollow of the madmen. At his side was the second door. No guard was in sight here. He jerked open the other door and stepped into that same room filled with books and manuscripts where he had slipped away from Miriam.

The room was empty, the hanging lamps still burning. Amazement seized upon the others at sight of this place; Janet Carson darted to the table, plunged eagerly at the manuscripts. There was no time to be wasted, however; O'Connor drew her away and passed on through the other chambers, following the way he had come with Miriam, trying to get back to Al Mansur's room and the corridor leading out of it.

In this he failed. After five minutes he realized that he was wandering aimlessly through the huge cavern cham-

bers, completely off his course. Nearly every one of the great rooms had a door or curtained way, besides the connecting archways between. All were empty; some were lighted only by one lamp, others by a dozen. This bewilderment was maddening, for at the very moment Palissy might be under torture. He had not entirely fooled Al Mansur, obviously.

In desperation, O'Connor turned to the first door he struck. The others were following him, staring all about them, marveling at everything in sight. When he pulled open the door, he found that it opened directly on a lighted corridor; whether the one he sought, was impossible to say. O'Connor halted sharply in the doorway, glanced over his shoulder.

"To me, Joulak!" he said quietly. "Some one coming."

THERE was a sound, as Joulak set down the drums of cartridges.

O'Connor drew back into the doorway. To his right, the passage continued for some distance before turning; but to his left, eight feet distant, was a sharp angle. The shuffle of feet came to him, and a voice babbling shrilly in some dialect he did not understand—whether in abject terror or in drunkenness, he could not say. Then came a savage growl in Arabic.

"On with you, son of Sheitan! Faster with him, Achmet; put your knife into the dog! We're off duty as soon as we're through with him. By Allah, I have better things to do than waste time on animals!"

A howl reëchoed. Three figures turned the corner.

A guard strode in the lead. Whatever work he had been at, its nature was plain; blood was spattered on his arms, and the sword in his hand

dripped crimson. The second guard, behind him, was also an Arab, and dragged along by a cord a shrieking wretch—a half-naked man of Negroid type, with blood streaming down his face. His eyes had been put out.

"Steel, Joulak!"

O'Connor stepped out. Quick as he was, swift as was the sweep of his Damascus blade, the Arab sprang lithely aside, swept up his own steel, met and parried the stroke. A yell of startled alarm burst from him. Joulak, knife in hand, came from behind O'Connor and hurled himself upon the second guard.

The Irishman had his hands full. The black-bearded Arab before him was a splendid specimen of manhood, and handled his blade with all the magnificent skill that made his people the first swordsmen of the East. As the two faced each other, as the blades clashed and clanged, everything else was forgotten by them both. O'Connor's thin, eager features blazed hawk-like from beneath his helmet, and a laugh touched his lips—but his eyes were very wary.

The blades rang out; the stamping feet lifted a thin, impalpable dust from the rock; the pantings and sharp curses of the two were gasped out in hot breath. A sharper clang, and O'Connor staggered as the other blade drove in on his steel helm. The dark, wild face opposite him blazed in exultation, but O'Connor laughed.

The laugh was drowned by a fearful shriek. The blinded wretch, flinging out his arms, caught the Arab about the waist. The guard caught out a dagger in his left hand and drove it into the miserable creature, then sprang clear and drove in at O'Connor. His voice leaped up.

"Allah! Allah Akbar!"

The Damascus blade flamed up and out—a curious blow, not drawing in after the manner of white men, but striking straight out in Japanese fashion. The razored steel touched the left wrist of the guard; that hand, lopped neatly away, fell to the floor, still clutching the poniard. A hoarse cry, a rush of blood—O'Connor struck again, swift as light, and his edge went home at the base of the neck. The guard swung around and flung out his arms. Then his knees were loosened and he pitched forward with a crash.

O'Connor drew back, wiping the sweat from his eyes, panting a little. Yet it had all passed very swiftly, in a wild and desperate burst of energy. Joulak was just rising from the body of the second guard, red knife in his hand. The blinded wretch was coughing out his life at one side.

"Come along," panted O'Connor, with a curious glance at Janet Carson. A smile came to his lips, a grim smile, for he saw that she stepped past the dead men without a second look; yet her pinched nostrils, her compressed lips, showed that it had not been simple to thus come face to face with reality.

JOULAK got the drums and, at a guess, O'Connor led the way past the angle whence these men had come. The corridor stretched ahead for twenty feet or more, then angled again. Two doors were in sight.

"Good stroke, captain," commented Larache, at O'Connor's elbow. "Remember when you beat that Italian chap at Oran, for the Médaille d'Afrique, with sabers? You used the same stroke then. An odd push to it."

"Japanese," said O'Connor. "Old Papa d'Estragues of Sidi-bel-Abbes perfected it and taught it to me. If we—listen!"

He halted. A rolling, thunderous sound was coming along the corridor—the tramp of feet, the tumultuous chatter of voices. No one or two men were coming, but a crowd. In a flash he saw that this was no place or time to open up with the automatic rifle; that would be sheer waste of their best ace. Better to slide out of the way, wait until they discovered Al Mansur or his guards in force—

"In there—quick!"

O'Connor pointed to the two doors. He advanced to one; it held against him. The other three crowded in at the second doorway. He drew back, flung himself desperately against the holding portal. The ancient wood cracked. Rolling thunders of noise were upon him; at any instant the approaching crowd would be around the corner. Another desperate thrust; this time the wood gave way with a crash.

He staggered in, caught the door and thrust it shut behind him. Outside swept past the pound of feet, the shrill laughter of women, the shouts of men; whatever debauchery was forward, it would be shocked soon enough into silence, he thought grimly, when they came upon the three dead men in the corridor beyond.

He took a step, intending to turn about and regain the corridor. Instead, everything seemed to give way beneath him.

He went crashing headlong in the darkness, amid splinterings and the smell of rotted ancient wood, and struck heavily, with stunning force that jarred every inch of his body and left him momentarily stunned, the breath knocked out of him. He heard Larache calling his name, distantly and faintly, but was unable to respond. Then silence.

Another odor came to him—the un-

mistakable damp feel of water. He heard a rustle, then a plunge. Things were moving here in the darkness. He heard a gasping breath.

That galvanized him into action. Fortunately he had pocketed his electric torch before meeting the guards; he fumbled for it, found it unbroken, sent a ray of light around him. A species of cold terror shot into his brain, as the ray struck upon water, darkly welling, within a foot of him. And in the water, a face; the face of a madman, knife between teeth, glaring at him with frenetically rolling eyeballs.

Abruptly, the face dived and was gone from sight. O'Connor caught a glimpse of a naked figure slipping away, vanishing in the water.

CHAPTER X.

THE TREASURE OF THE CAVES.

VERY carefully, O'Connor sat up, sent the light ray shooting around. Fresh amazement seized upon him. The expanse of water seemed very large. He had only been saved from going into it by something that lay here at the very edge, blocking his way. He threw the light upon it, and caught his breath.

It was the headless body of a naked black.

O'Connor rolled away with a shiver of disgust, saw his Damascus blade at a little distance, and picked it up. He was on an inclined plane of stone, which sloped down to the water. From the look of the stone at the edge, he imagined this place must be extremely old; perhaps a reservoir of some sort. The water seemed some thirty feet across, stretching out into the darkness.

But how had he come here?

Close by him lay fragments of old carven wood, rotted and smashed. The light ray flashed up and around. There, ten or twelve feet above him, he discerned a great mass of wood, much of it broken. It appeared to be some sort of balcony, through which he had gone with a grand smash.

"Larache! Janet!"

No answer came from his call, which volleyed back in weird echoes from the irregular roof of stone. He swept the water with his light, and saw nothing of that wild, mad swimmer. He could guess why the body of the black was headless, and what horrid work the madman had been about when disturbed. A shiver of disgust and horror seized upon him.

"By the saints, what a hell-hole this is, all of it!" he muttered. "Mad creatures like rats, feeding on human flesh—devil take it all! Let's see how to get out. The others have gone. Perhaps they had to make a dash for it, or weren't sure that I'd popped in at that door above. No getting back that way, anyhow."

He found that the sloping, ten-foot-wide ledge of rock ran on beside the water for twelve feet or so, then ended abruptly in a door.

Approaching it, O'Connor felt an idle curiosity at all the doors and woodwork in these caverns. Ancient they must be, indeed. Then he recalled that historically the desolation of North Africa was a modern thing.

In ancient times it had been the richest province of Rome; under the Vandals it had continued as the granary of the world. Even the first tide of Arab conquest had not appreciably harmed it. The second tide, the great hordes of half-civilized Arabs pouring up out of the Egyptian deserts, had like a locust-cloud destroyed everything in

their passage, even to the civilization of their own race and people. From that day, northern Africa had been a desert. And according to the documents he had found, these caves of the Kefra *massif* had been utilized at exactly this period.

Impatience gripped him as he recalled what might be happening even now to Palissy in the ominously named Red Chamber.

He came to the door and tested it. It was held securely in place by massive wooden bars, and was covered with iron plates; but the bars and the door itself were rotted away to a mere shell, the iron plates were smears of red rust. When O'Connor thrust his foot at it, he kicked clean through.

In two minutes he had destroyed enough of the door to gain passage. There was a rush of foul air, but the ray of light darted into a wide chamber with high roof. Drawing back, he lit a cigarette and then pressed through the smashed door.

Instant astonishment seized him, held him motionless. Here, clearly enough, was one chamber that Al Mansur had never found in all his boasted five hundred years of occupancy—in reality, perhaps five or six years. It was evident, by all indications, that this room had never been touched since it was sealed up. Perhaps no one had burst through the wooden balcony before this night—apparently the only way of gaining access here.

DIRECTLY before O'Connor, set against a squat round pillar of rock, was a life-sized Byzantine crucifix, the figure of carven ivory, the cross itself a glory of mosaic and solid gold, studded with gems. At one side were half a dozen huge sealed chests. On them, on rock shelves about the

walls, and heaped below the shelves, was a treasure such as O'Connor had never glimpsed or dreamed in all his years of adventuring.

Church ornaments, vessels, furniture, for the most part; reliquaries, icons, lamps, chalices. Other things, now mere piles of dust and rot. Arms and armor of all descriptions. Two great earthenware jars six feet high; he approached them curiously, tipped one over, found it empty. Probably they had contained wine.

The massive chests attracted him, for here was certainly the treasure of the caverns, missed by Al Mansur. The irony of it was tremendous. There was the man, wrecking the brains and lives of other men, creating a miniature Hades and heaven, for the sake of wealth and power—when here all the while was more wealth than he could ever hope to amass by cruelty and evil.

Then remembrance of Palissy, of what he was about, roused O'Connor.

He flung the light around. Nowhere was there any sign of opening. The place had but the one exit and entrance. Somehow he must reach that rotted balcony, if he were to regain the corridors above. He glanced around swiftly, went to one of the great earthenware jars, and tested it. Not too heavy—

Rolling it from its place, he managed to lift it, staggered with it to the door, smashed down the frame. A moment later he had the huge jar underneath the hole in the balcony. Up through this he tossed the Damascus blade, then carefully clambered to the rim of the jar. It rocked beneath him, but held. He rose erect, within reach of the beams, and studied them for a long moment, pulling away the ends of rotted, splintered planks.

Then, pocketing the flash light, he wagered everything on a spring upward, and won.

The woodwork swayed, cracked ominously, threatened to go down—but held as he drew himself across it. He got to his feet, took out his torch and retrieved his curved blade. Then, gingerly, he crossed the edge of the broken space to the door, forced it open, and was out again in the passage.

There was no sign of his companions.

He had expected none. He had no idea of how much time might have elapsed since his plunge into the darkness, but in any case they could not have delayed for him, risking the loss of everything.

O'Connor strode on down the corridor. His helmet had gone long since, but no matter; he could not hope to pass for one of the guards in the distinct light of the soft lamps. A white figure appeared ahead, and he strode on toward it.

Abruptly, he recognized the girl Miriam, running. Her black hair was streaming, and about her body whipped tattered fragments of her thin robe, smeared with blood. She halted at sight of O'Connor and stood staring at him blankly, trembling with terror.

"Miriam!" he exclaimed sharply. "Lead me to the Red Chamber—quickly! You understand?"

"Yes, lord," she assented, evidently without recognition. "But—but *he* is there—"

"Lead me, at once," cut in O'Connor. "You will not be harmed."

"The bodyless ones!" she whimpered. "They protect him—"

"Obey!"

O'Connor's imperative command broke her weakened will. Without further protest she turned and led him

down the corridor, stopped before a door and opened it. He followed her into another but more dimly lighted passage. A long, gasping shriek sounded from somewhere ahead, ending abruptly. She came to a halt.

"There, lord—at the end! I dare not go—"

O'Connor pushed her aside and pressed on. The shriek told clearly of devil's work going forward in that Red Chamber. There was no time to lose, if Palissy were to be saved!

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE RED CHAMBER.

AT the end of this passage was a wide opening upon which converged other corridors, but now there was no mistaking his objective. From a door, half ajar, came a glare of reddish light and the sound of voices. That of Al Mansur broke out sharply.

"Tighten up the ropes! I'll have the truth out of him, by Allah!"

"You dog from hell!" snarled the voice of Palissy in Arabic, and then emitted a flood of imprecations. O'Connor, hurrying forward, shifted the blade to his left hand and jerked out his automatic.

He shoved the half-open door aside, and stepped into the Red Chamber.

Upon the floor, almost at his feet, lay a distorted corpse. Directly before him was Al Mansur, in splendid silken garments, directing two half-naked blacks who were trussing the stripped figure of Palissy upon a rack. No one else was in the place. Lamps emitting a scarlet glare hung from the ceiling, and a brazier of charcoal glowed dimly; to right and left were implements of torture.

O'Connor laughed a little as he threw up his pistol. Al Mansur swung around, and O'Connor fired at him point-blank.

"See if your spirits will stop hot lead, Skoboloff!" he exclaimed, as the man went staggering backward.

Two shots more, reverberating like thunder in the cavern. Coolly, he fired none the less rapidly, deliberately shooting each of the blacks through the head, and then swung around to make certain of Al Mansur.

To his amazement, the man had disappeared.

Palissy was yelling at him frantically. O'Connor darted to the rack and with the scimitar shore through the cords. The one-eyed man spat an oath at him.

"You didn't kill him! Blast it, captain—"

"Eh? I let him have it over the heart," said O'Connor. The other laughed as he got clear. "Are you hurt?"

"Not to speak of. Let him have it over the heart, did you? Well, why d'you think I'm here, eh? Because I shot him twice through the heart—and you know I don't miss, me! All it did was to stagger him a bit."

"Devil take it!" exclaimed O'Connor, in stupefied realization. "Why didn't I think of that, now? He wears a bullet-proof vest, of course. If I'd only shot for the head! I tried to make sure of him—"

Palissy intervened. "That's it, captain. I remember now hearing some of them tell how he'd stand up and let his men shoot at him with rifles, to show that bullets wouldn't hurt him. *Diantre!* If we'd only plumped for the eye, eh? Well, we'll know better next time. He slid out the door yonder. They thought you were dead."

"Sober, are you?" demanded O'Connor.

"Sober," repeated the other, rubbing his wrists and grimacing. "The devil suspected something wrong when I reported. Oh, I was sobered up quick enough! They've killed two or three of their own chaps."

"You've no weapon? Take my pistol. I've another. Here's a fresh clip. Now get out and find that radio room!"

"Eh? Where are the others, Larrache and—"

"I've lost 'em," snapped O'Connor angrily. "March, blast you!"

"Thanks for giving me a hand, captain," said the one-eyed rascal. "I need clothes, but they can wait. Yes, I think I can find the place—come out by this doorway over here. The room has half a dozen. You can get to this part of the caverns from anywhere."

"Hurry, then, before Al Mansur sounds the alarm!"

PALISSY, fortunately, had so far undergone no actual torture, except for a few blows from the fist of Al Mansur, which troubled him not in the least. He darted across the chamber, with a kick at the two blacks as he passed them, his lean, scarred body looking like an evil sprite in the reddish glare. Jerking aside a curtain, he flung open a door, and O'Connor followed him out into a lighted corridor.

"Come along—I'm sure of it now!" Palissy swung off to the left.

So far no sound of alarm, and O'Connor wondered if after all Al Mansur might have been pierced by the bullet, if he had dragged himself away to die in some corner. No such luck, was his bitter reflection. Then Palissy halted and tested a door on

the right—carefully swung it open. He peered in, grinned, and beckoned O'Connor.

At this instant came the alarm—the thin, strident sound sweeping through all the passages as though electric gongs were being rung. O'Connor cursed at the sound of it, and flung forward through the doorway.

A radio chamber, indeed, was this; a huge room with high vaulted roof, wireless equipment standing about on all sides. The center of all this was a huge table bearing a Marconi set; evidently of great power. Two men were at the table, wearing headphones, conferring together. The alarm signal had just startled them. One was taking a pistol from a drawer at his hand. Both were fairly young—Arabs, thought O'Connor in the one swift glimpse he had of them. Probably French trained, as they wore khaki instead of Arab robes.

He never learned more, for Palissy shot both of them down with cold certainty. One fell, the other twisted about, screamed, jerked up his pistol. Palissy's third bullet took him between the eyes, and he moved no more.

"Destroy everything in sight," said O'Connor, and darted to the table.

His quick glance had already taken in the typewriter there, with a half-written message on the platen—something had just been coming in when the alarm sounded, it seemed. Palissy dragged one of the fallen men aside.

"In a moment, captain," he rejoined, and began to strip the man. "I can smash things up better when my bare pelt is covered—"

O'Connor disregarded him, seizing the message that was half written and holding it to the light of the overhead lamp. It was comprehensive, and he perceived that it was the decoding of

a long and apparently meaningless message typed on the top portion of the sheet, wherein the names used had been concealed in sending.

Have just received telephonic message from Delisle, at Tunis. He is *en route* to join you by avion. Has ordered me to send caravan from El Agurt without him; will do so immediately. Full electrical equipment ordered has been received and packed for camel transport. No inquiries or questions. Wire from Paris headquarters transmits warning in regard to man named Suleiman, who is possible agent of governor general, given full authority to investigate—

There the message ended. That the latter portion referred to Solomon, there could be no doubt whatever.

"The electrical equipment will be a bit late," and O'Connor chuckled as he pocketed the paper. "Faith, we stopped this from reaching Al Mansur, anyhow. Maybe we can pick up some more information here."

He leaned over the desk and began to rummage through everything in sight, but found no further messages. He came upon a complete code-book, however, and also a list of names and addresses in a frame, obviously those of the syndicate and its agents. This he exultantly tore away from its frame and pocketed.

MEANTIME crash upon crash had resounded through the chamber, as Palissy plunged into the work of destruction. Instrument board, batteries, everything in sight was being relentlessly smashed and hammered. Then came a sharp hiss of warning, followed by an excited voice.

"Fortesque! That you? Damn it all, where have you been? There's—"

O'Connor straightened up and swung around. A guard had just en-

tered. The voice, the English speech, showed that here was the same renegade he had encountered in the outer passage.

The man stared at him in stupefied astonishment.

Palissy's automatic cracked from one side. To the sharp report, the renegade threw both hands to his face and pitched over.

"Slap in the eye, captain!" came the jubilant exclamation.

"Right," said O'Connor coolly. "Let's clear out of here now. Can you find Al Mansur's headquarters?"

"More or less," said Palissy, coming forward. "I'm not at all sure about it, but I can make a try. That place is close to the big central cave, after you come in from the main entrance. A large gallery leads out of the hall. The cursed place is like the spokes on a hub, with the one large gallery, and I think the chief's headquarters are off that gallery. I can find my way there, with a bit of luck. Look here, captain! I just happened to think about that girl of mine, Miriam. Those devils grabbed her, along with me—"

"She wasn't hurt particularly. I imagine she broke away from them," said O'Connor. "I met her, and she guided me here. She will be all right. Why? Interested in her?"

"Name of a black dog! You said it, captain," exclaimed Palissy, unwontedly serious. "I want to find her again."

O'Connor gave him a hard look. "Why? You scoundrel, you'd better think twice what you're about. I'm no Al Mansur, let me tell you—"

"Eh? I'm honest about it. *Sacré bleu!* Give a man credit, can't you? Drunken fooling with the girls is one thing; but devil take me, captain, I'm honest about it! And I put in my word for her right now, with you."

"Agreed," said O'Connor. "Provided she's the same when we all get this mess cleared up, and your honest intentions don't suffer any change. I am not sure about either event. Right now you pocket that extra gun and carry on."

Palissy grinned and saluted.

"Thanks, my captain. I'll take the lead."

The alarm signal had by this time died away. Through the corridors rolled a dim confusion of sound, amid which it was possible to distinguish nothing coherent; it seemed as though every one in these underground habitations must all be crying out at once. Yet they saw no person until they came suddenly upon a striking evidence that Al Mansur's magic was still powerful upon his subjects.

A shot rang out ahead of them, and about a turn of the passage appeared one of the black Sudanese, naked to the waist, swinging a scimitar at the empty air around him. His eyes bulged, he dodged and struck as he ran, panted shouts and exclamations burst from him. The invisible hands of the bodyless ones were clearly at work upon him.

O'Connor shouted at him as he came close, but the black appeared not to see him. Instead, a frenzy came upon the glistening figure; his steel whirred and sang about him on all sides. With a sudden leap and spring, he was upon the Irishman—who, half suspecting some ruse, knocked the flailing steel aside and struck the life out of the black man.

They passed on, intense disgust seizing upon O'Connor for what he had done; yet no choice had been given him.

"I know this turning, captain!" exclaimed Palissy abruptly, from behind.

"We're close to the gallery now—what's that?"

THROUGH the reverberating din that filled the passage there pierced sharper, louder crepitations—the unmistakable sound of shots. Another turn ahead, and the passage widened out as they approached it. A thrill shot through O'Connor; everything was drowned by a sharp burst of staccato noise, the acrid odor of powder gases came to their nostrils. He knew the automatic rifle was at work, somewhere ahead.

Comparative silence fell. Then, without warning, pandemonium broke loose. Just as they reached the angle in the passage, it was filled before them with a frantic, rushing mass of men, screaming shrilly in blind panic. No guards or blacks—Arabs, they seemed, perhaps the men of the caravan encamped outside. O'Connor never knew for certain.

With a rush, they were upon the two figures, pouring upon them headlong. O'Connor struck out desperately, fired shot after shot from the pistol in his left hand, heard the reports of Palissy's automatic. He was swept aside like a leaf on an ocean wave. About him were wild faces, waving knives, clubs. A blade shattered on his mail-shirt. Some one seized his legs and brought him down.

They poured over him, stabbing, kicking, striking, in a wild tide seeking only to flee away and be gone. And through the tumult rose again the staccato, stammering stutter of the automatic rifle.

Somewhat, O'Connor got to his feet. His Damascus blade was gone, but he had the pistol and two shots cleared a way for him. He burst through the last of that frenzied tide and went

staggering on into the wider turn of the passage.

Dimly he realized why the Arabs had fled. Bullets were striking all around him here, ricocheting from the walls with wild whistles, screaming past in the air. Flying feet had stirred the dust of ages so that everything seemed smoky, blurred to the sight. O'Connor tripped over a body and came to hands and knees. Palissy had vanished, borne away in the rush.

Horror gripped him as he peered ahead and saw the scene there.

Here was the wide gallery described by Palissy, perhaps twenty feet across, shooting straight ahead on a slight incline to a great central hall with lofty dome. Fifty feet away, where the gallery entered this high hall, was a surging swarm of figures. A shot or two cracked out, no more. O'Connor had arrived too late.

The automatic rifle had jammed. In the soft glow of the lamps, a score of men were just sweeping over the three against the angle of the wall—guards and Negroes, with a few Arabs. Shots rang out. Sergeant Larache was gone. Joulak fought there, pistoling the foremost as they rushed him, then doubling up in convulsion as bullets tore into him. He was gone, too.

O'Connor leaped up, slipping a fresh clip into the pistol. He caught sight of a trim shape in khaki lying to one side, and lost his head completely. With a hoarse yell of fury, he ran forward, emptying his pistol into the crowd of them. Al Mansur was there somewhere, for his powerful voice was echoing amid the din.

It was sheer madness, this rush of his. Instead of breaking before him, they turned and leaped for him like a pack of wolves. The pistol was empty, and he had no chance now to reload.

They were upon him, struck him like a wave breaking on a rock as he tried desperately to gain that khaki figure lying beside the jammed rifle.

He won forward foot by foot, fighting them bare-handed in berserk rage, as knives clashed and thudded against his mail-shirt. A huge black leaped bodily upon him, gripping him about the neck, the reek of the oiled body rank in his nostrils. O'Connor smashed blows into the black frame again and

again, a red mist before his eyes; the others were in about him, clutching at him on all sides, dragging him down by sheer weight.

He was gone from sight at last. For an instant he reappeared among them, reddened fists hammering—then he was gone again. The mass closed in above him. For a little it heaved and eddied, then gradually quieted.

Al Mansur came striding up to the place of victory.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Long Tom

ONE of the most famous pieces of ordnance in the possession of the United States is Long Tom. Almost forty years ago it was returned to this country by Portugal after seventy-nine years' service in Castle Santa Cruz, in Fayal, the Azores, where the recent mutiny of Portuguese troops occurred.

The ancient gun is a forty-two-pounder. Once a part of the armament of the French battleship *Hoche*, when that vessel was taken by the British in 1798, the gun was sold to John B. Murray of New York who happened to be in England when the prize was stripped. The new owner brought the gun home and tried to sell it to the United States government, but it was rejected.

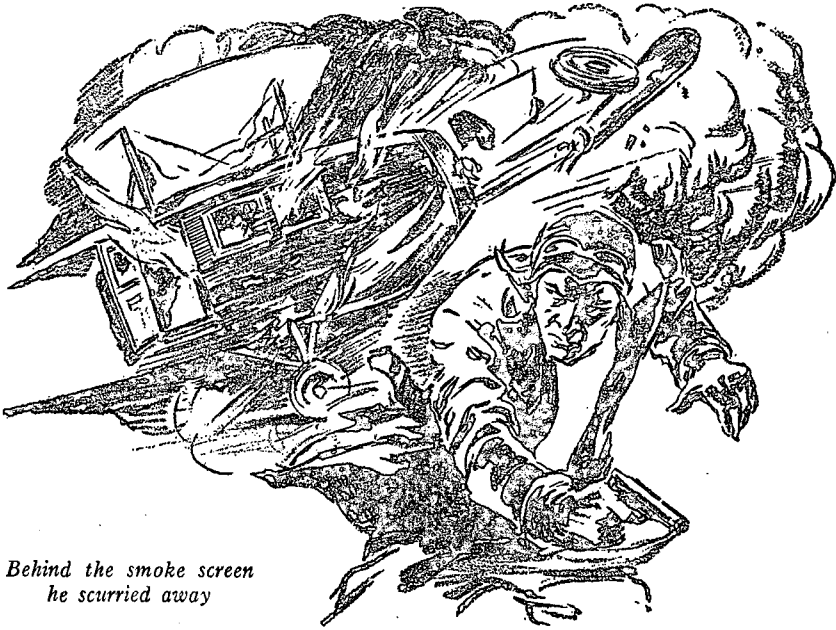
Then Murray, by a contract with the Emperor of Haiti, fitted out three vessels of war in 1804 to serve against France and the gun was on one of them. After the repulse of the French, Long Tom was brought again to New York and lay idle until 1812. It was then mounted on a small brigantine privateer, the *General Armstrong*.

This vessel was commanded by Captain Samuel Chester Reid who had a crew of ninety officers and men, all anxious for a brush with the British. At noon on September 26, 1814, the *General Armstrong* put in at Fayal for water. That night a British fleet closed the port.

But the Americans would not surrender. The little privateer fought the entire fleet until its commander beached it in a sinking condition. Then from the shore the Americans continued the fight, inflicting on the enemy, during a week's hostilities, the almost incredible loss of three hundred men in killed and wounded, and losing only two killed and seven wounded on their side. Long Tom was responsible for the most of the British casualties.

Finally the British fleet sailed away for New Orleans.

Charles Adams.



*Behind the smoke screen
he scurried away*

Temptation on the Wing

Cliff Steward was, he thought, as high above temptation as the plane he piloted was above the ground—but many an overloaded plane has crashed

By A. S. GREGORY

PILOT CLIFF STEWARD was above temptation. He believed that, because nothing otherwise had ever occurred to him. The pilot of an air liner never thinks of robbing his passengers, and, naturally, Cliff never thought of looting his own cargo.

His employers knew he possessed that rare virtue to the *n*th degree. They had searched his record for ten years back and had found only deeds of high courage, great flying skill, a cool head in emergencies, and an excellent character which was heavily underscored three times. That had been sufficient even for the cynical masters of finance.

His friends, on the other hand, during idle moments of hangar gossip,

publicly told each other that he was a fool of the first water. Privately, however, they envied him for his unimpeachable honesty, his way with a plane, and the check in four figures which he pulled down every month.

Cliff was pilot for a large, State-wide chain banking system. For two years he had piloted the big, single-motored monoplane which had come to be known as the flying bank. His duties were, largely, to carry officials on inspection tours, and occasionally to transfer coin of the realm from branch banks to the head office at San Francisco.

To-day he was carrying currency to meet a sudden municipal bond require-

ment. He had left Seattle secretly at dawn, stopped at Tacoma, Portland, Eugene and intermediate points, and had taken on enough gas at Medford to finish his journey. Now he was battling along over the Siskiyou Mountains like a weary horse that knows he is homeward bound.

Yet he found himself stirring about uneasily. He searched the clear sky, the ground, the roomy cabin of his plane, as though he vaguely sensed some evil presence. The picture of that strange, unlicensed plane leaving Medford just ahead of him flashed into his mind. His eyes constantly flicked across the motor instruments. He decided finally that the responsibility of ferrying more money than usual was making him restless.

Wondering how much there was, he brought out from the big pocket of his flying jacket a sheaf of duplicate receipts of acceptance. The originals he had signed and left in the possession of each branch bank manager. Mentally he summed up the total and discovered that he was carrying the staggering figure of four million dollars.

"Four million bucks!" Cliff repeated aloud to himself, and glanced backward over his shoulder to the great pile of bags. They were by no means ordinary canvas money sacks. They were special pouches about twenty-four inches wide and forty inches long, made of pure asbestos, lined inside and out with durable canvas, steel-riveted on sides and bottom, and having triple locking devices designed to keep flames from penetrating the neck. They were quilted with steel copper-coated rivets to prevent disintegration of the asbestos in case of fire in a crash, and contained air pockets to keep out scorching heat from the interior and shriveling the currency. An imposing sight. It is

little wonder, then, that to one who had signed for the heap, it should cause some uneasiness.

The largest amount Cliff ever carried before had been half a million dollars. And it hadn't bothered him a particle. Like carrying mail in the old days on the Pasco-Salt Lake City run. But four million was something else again. At a thousand a month—which he earned—he'd have to work four thousand months. More than three hundred and thirty-three years. Wow!

AS if some one had struck him a blow from behind, Cliff whirled in his seat. There was a tingling sensation at the back of his neck. He expected to see some sinister creature emerge from the rows of bags. There wasn't the slightest movement, except from the sudden pitching of the plane due to the trembling of his hands and feet upon the sensitive controls. He studied his maps, the familiar mountains below, sighted down the side to check for drift, rummaged in his pockets—anything to divert his mind.

The figures kept running through his head. Like a sleepless man counting sheep, he erected taller hurdles, only to see the woolly animals leaping higher. Like Alpine goats with nimble, springy feet the beasts sailed over the barriers in great arcs. And painted on the side of each, in large, black letters, he saw the fascinating numerals of four million.

He stole a furtive look over his shoulder. Tightly wrapped packages of crisp bills in those bags. Fives and tens and twenties; fifties and hundreds. Yellowbacks. No end to them. Wealth there to make an Indian rajah envious. Riches that would have warmed the mahogany heart of the boldest pirate who had ever sailed the seven seas. A

prize worthy of the elusive and cunning Scarface Al Capone. Cliff rubbed his moist palms on his thighs.

A plane of his own. A big, silver-winged tri-motor, with hammered silver engine cowlings and gold throttle knobs to fly around the world in. Strange lands to browse about. A country estate in some secluded nook of paradise. Obsequious servants. Plenty of leisure to toy with the finer arts. No more of the daily grind. No more getting up at five in the morning. Rich!

Cliff fished in his pockets for a handkerchief and blew his nose hard. He listened to the even beat of the propeller. The throb of the motor was changed now. Four million, four million was the liquid tune which temptation on the wing hummed into his ears. He squirmed restlessly. He chewed on a hangnail, ripped it out with his teeth and saw the big drop of blood pop out on his right forefinger. He pressed the finger hard against his leg.

In the glass of the tachometer he beheld a face. A strange face that wrung a sharp cry from his tight lips and caused him to twist about. No, there was nobody standing behind him. He was alone in the cabin of his speeding plane. Again he looked in the glass. The same startling features.

On a dawn patrol one time over France he had seen his face in the compass bowl. But that time it had been fear which made it look so strange. The stark horror of having a dead stick and two boche on his tail. But he had spun into the clouds.

Though the eyes were dilated, it wasn't fear now. The two lines down the sides of his long, straight nose were deeper. The nostrils were pinched white and quivering with hissing breath. The mouth was a thin line. Cupidity in that face, and greed, and

the avarice of a foreclosing skinflint. He brushed his hand roughly across the mask and pounded his chest.

"What the devil am I thinking about?" he shouted to himself. "What's wrong with me to-day? No, not that! I can't do it! I'm no thief!"

SUDDENLY changing tactics from the merciless goading, temptation began to preen its gaudy feathers and to croon a seductive song. Cliff heard the honeyed voice. Low and sweet, it gradually took possession of his mind and body until he was swaying to the rhythm of it. The little cajoling voice became ever more insistent, bewitching and tantalizing, gripping him with its luring melody so that he became an unconscious part of the aircraft.

"Do it!" whispered the voice. "Take the money. Four million dollars. It's yours. Do the things you've always wanted to do. Make your dreams come true. Be a free man. Free to do and go as you please. Fly in your own plane. Sail in royal suites. The world will bow and scrape at your feet. A millionaire. Wine and song, and the laughter of happy girls.

"Only fools work," the voice reminded him. "Only fools worry and sweat and starve. Wake up! Live awhile! You've fought and bled and slaved long enough. Take it easy, boy. Four million dollars.

"Caught?" mocked the voice scornfully. "Pshaw! You'll never get caught. Not four million dollars. Look down. What do you see? Mountains. Barren piles of rock. Thick timber. Right below you, look closer. See the old abandoned miner's cabin? You can land there. Hide the four million.

"Fix the rudder and wheel of the plane," the voice spurred him on. "Set

it for a long climb. Drain most of the oil. Open the throttle and let the machine take off by itself. Twenty miles away at ten thousand feet the hot bearings will blow the plane up.

"Somebody will see it falling and burning," explained the voice. "They'll look for the money and for you. But there won't be anything in the wreckage. Then next year come back to the world with a miner's beard, a new name and—four million dollars!"

Suddenly Pilot Cliff Steward's heart stopped. He grabbed for the throttle and jiggled it frantically. The motor continued to splutter miserably. His fuel gauge showed a tank two-thirds full. Something wrong with the ignition. He felt the heavily loaded plane becoming sluggish. The air speed dropped to fifty miles. A wing dipped for the starting of a flat spin. He shoved the nose down to dive for flying speed, waited until the wind was tearing through the rigging, and eased up to a fairly fast glide.

Then Cliff laughed. The rollicking laugh of one who sees a false but dazzling road ahead of him. Hadn't Fate played right smack into his hands? He hadn't touched the throttle or the switch. Fate had cut the motor. Therefore, it was written that he should do this.

What's the use, he thought, of trying to buck destiny? Follow the path that's marked out. It's been done before. It'll continue to be done until the end of the world. Now is the time. Four million!

With a firm, smooth hand Cliff guided his powerless plane down to the half section of table land. He saw the thin, glistening ribbon of a stream, and the crude cabin set in scrub pine. The hum of struts softened as he pulled gently back. He felt the wheels touch,

then he swerved a little and came to a halt near a small pyramid of rock.

Now that he was down on solid earth, the pilot of the flying bank felt himself suddenly become icy-cold. He looked down at the goose flesh rippling out on his wrists and the back of his hands. A violent shiver convulsed him, though the air was stifling hot. He pushed back all the windows of the enclosed cockpit. A strong desire to look back into the cabin seized him. Instead, he fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette and lit the weed.

A few quick, long pulls burned the cigarette down to his fingers. He mashed out the light against the rim of his control wheel and snapped it overside. His brain was smoldering now, and he rose swiftly to begin the work of unloading the asbestos money bags.

BUT to his trained ears came a familiar sound. Thin as a whistling reed in a morning breeze, the shrill whine quickly became louder. Crouching against the back of his seat, Cliff looked up.

He saw a plane overhead gliding down in wide, flat spirals. Occasionally the motor was blipped full as the pilot up there jazzed the throttle to keep the engine from overloading with gas and choking.

Possibly a Boeing mail pilot, thought Cliff, who had seen him forced down. He cursed harshly at the unexpected thwarting of his plans. Even though he waved the man away, signalling that he didn't need help, his own machine would be recognized. The forced landing place would be reported and searching parties would come here.

Cliff observed, however, that the machine was a monoplane. As it approached closer it struck him that

there was something familiar about the craft. A pale blue fuselage and wings, with the new wide, spokeless wheels. And there was no Department of Commerce license number either upon the top wing or the rudder. Then Cliff remembered.

It was the plane which had taken off at Medford when he had finished gassing. He had asked the field attendants who it was that was flying about the country without a license. Some experimental ship, he had been told. But where had it been all this time, Cliff asked himself? He hadn't seen a single plane in the air. Unless it had been sitting up high above him.

Cliff poked his head over the top wing to watch the plane land. He knew that the man on the controls was a mighty good pilot. He hadn't set his own bus down a bit neater. His first impulse was to jump out of his machine, but on cautious second thought he decided to wait to see how many were in there.

Fifty yards away the strange mono-plane came to a stop. Cliff saw the prop stilled as the switch was cut. Three men tumbled out. One of them waved.

"Need any help?" Cliff heard him shout.

He made no answer. The man who had called out suddenly jammed his hands into his pockets. The other two were keeping their arms behind their backs. It didn't look right. One of them stumbled. He caught the sudden glint of sun on something metallic.

Cliff saw it then. Robbers! They had trailed him out of Medford. Had planned to shoot him down somewhere over this desolate stretch of mountains. And his motor had failed him. Three against one. Four million dollars. He'd never get out alive.

Cliff darted back and reached under his seat. In his right hand he was gripping a pistol.

"What do you fellows want?" he challenged.

Instantly the three men brought up their guns. Twice Cliff fired. Random shots, for he had no time to aim. He ducked and slid down the flooring. The air crackled from the fusillade. He heard the bullets scream overhead, ping against the motor, and one slug shattered the rim of his control wheel.

HE threw himself on top of the steel-riveted asbestos bags. They were bullet-proof, he knew. Four of the bags he tossed against the side of his plane, and dropped in back of them. With the muzzle of his gun he punched a hole in the fabric of the fuselage. They were running up fast, two of them firing gangster machine guns. He aimed at the one in the lead. The biggest one. With a long face like an ape. *Crack!*

He saw the man stagger. The gun dropped from the bandit's hand and he clutched at his thigh. On his face the man fell.

The other two bandits broke their stride, stopped. Then they began dodging and ripping out long blasts with their machine guns. Cliff felt the lead thudding against the money bags which shielded him. Hard blows like sledge hammers, but the bullets failed to penetrate the tough material.

A brief lull followed. Cliff drew a bead on another. A sharp cry echoed upon the explosion of his gun. The two tore back to their plane.

"Just nicked him," Cliff spoke aloud "Better finish this bird before he reaches his gun."

Cliff aimed for the head of the wounded gangster who was slowly

crawling toward the gun he had dropped. He tugged at the trigger when he realized that his pistol was empty. By the time he found the extra clip for his automatic he saw through the window that the crippled thug had succeeded in hobbling to the plane.

The air suddenly was split by the roar of a motor. He saw the robber plane move on. Lucky thing, that, Cliff thought. Only nine shots left for his thirty-eight gun. One more rush and they'd have finished him.

"I guess they don't know what I've got here," he said. But Cliff quickly changed his mind. His forehead wrinkled as in amazement he watched the monoplane swing about and taxi toward his own machine. At first he thought they were turning to taxi to the far end of the level ground for a take-off. Now they were coming straight for him.

Immediately he saw what their plan was. They were moving their plane closer for protection. From the inside of their craft they'd batter away at him with machine guns. And only nine cartridges left for his own pistol to shoot blindly.

Cliff hurled himself into feverish action. He piled all the bags up in a half circle to form a strong barricade. A four-million-dollar fort. His lips moved silently. Could he hold out? Perhaps he could find what was wrong with his motor, quickly fix it, and take off. No time for that. They were too close. There, they'd cut their motor.

At the same moment he detected the barrel of a machine gun thrust out of the cockpit between the two top cylinders of the air-cooled engine. He crouched low. Muffled roaring of the rapid-firing weapon sounded in his ears. Bullets ricocheted off the steel frame,

hissed through the taut fabric of his fuselage, and whacked into the heavy asbestos. He saw the bags move as if some one with the colic were jumping inside. His plane rocked under the impact. For a long minute the deadly stream kept pouring around him.

WHEN the firing ceased Cliff looked up. The upper side of his cabin was a sieve. He saw a head peering out of the cockpit. The man's mouth was moving, evidently telling his crew that all was over. Cliff held his gun close to a hole which had been reamed out by many bullets. His hand was trembling, so that he gripped his right wrist with his left fingers and braced both elbows.

Carefully Pilot Steward drew his sights. A small target at fifty feet. Right into that curling mouth. Holding his breath, he released the trigger. *Bang!* He saw the cruel head vanish from view.

There was quite a long delay and Cliff believed that he had killed one of the trio—the pilot. Another was wounded, so that left only one and he had eight shots left in his clip. His spirits rose. Things didn't look so hopeless now.

He'd finish all three, slash the bags open, take out the currency, burn his plane and make away in the robbers' machine. Eventually the place would be found and the ghastly scene would tell the story.

He'd even exchange clothes with one of the dead men and batter the face beyond recognition. They'd say it was him and give the body a heroic burial. With his sleeve he wiped the perspiration dripping into his eyes.

His hope was short-lived. Suddenly two guns leaped into view. Cliff flopped down on his stomach. Like hailstones

now the bullets ripped into his plane. From nose to rudder the guns swept the frail craft. A thunderous, deafening din.

Without the protective barrier of those heavy bags even a cat could not have survived the terrible barrage.

Then pungent, volatile fumes struck the nostrils of the pilot. A hurried glance upward revealed twin streams of gasoline trickling into the cockpit. The wing tanks were pierced! Cliff gasped. His hands flew to his face, for as he looked he saw wisps of white smoke curling down. Next moment the forward part of his plane was a mass of flame.

Cliff had no time to think coherently. Only one thought beat into his burning brain. He must get out! He kicked the cabin door open. Luckily it was on the side away from the desperadoes. On his back he fell to the ground. When he gained his feet, he saw black smoke shooting skyward. Behind this smoke screen he scurried to the pyramid of rock that stood about thirty-five feet away.

Hardly had he thrown himself behind this new shelter when the ground was shaken by a terrible explosion. His plane now was completely enveloped in fierce, crackling flames, and the soot-black smoke puffed up like a thunder cloud. A blackened, smoldering skeleton. That was all that remained of the famous flying bank.

Crouching behind the pile of stone Cliff peered through a chink. He saw the other craft moving slowly backward, and there were two bandits at the tailplanes dragging frantically. They had rolled their machine to safety from the scorching heat. He didn't think they had seen him escape the fire, so he decided to wait. When the wreckage had cooled they'd come close after

the money, and he had his pistol with eight shots.

STILL carrying guns, the two bandits soon approached. Now Cliff saw that one of them was the man he thought he had killed. He watched the men kick the warped frame. Then together they took hold of the tail and moved the charred mass. In the center was the great pile of blackened bags. The money was safe, he knew. He saw them poke around with the muzzles of their queer guns. Then they laid the guns on the ground and, gingerly grasping a pouch, dragged it out.

"Millions here," he heard one of them say. "Didn't I tell you the bills were packed in fireproof sacks?"

"But where's the fella?" asked the other. "Don't see him."

"Probably not much left of him," was the answer. "He's where he belongs. Come on, hustle up! Let's get the stuff out and get going!"

As the two bandits bent to their task of plundering, Cliff squirmed into position to shoot. Their backs were turned toward him and they were stooped over, so he waited for them to straighten up. Then he'd plug them right between the shoulder blades.

But his movements dislodged the topmost rock of the pyramid. With a loud clattering sound the stone rattled to the ground. Involuntarily Cliff jumped to his feet. He saw the pair whirl, gape at him for a split moment. Like tigers snarling over a fresh carcass, they faced each other.

Cliff was cool now. His eyes glittered with the lust to kill. Steady was his hand. Before one had even reached his gun, Cliff toppled him over with a bullet through the top of his head. The other started to fire from the hip. Cliff shot him squarely between the eyes.

He ran up to see if both were dead. To make certain he planted another piece of lead in each one's head. One of them appeared about his size, thin and of medium height. His clothes would fit. Cliff knelt to strip off the coat and vest.

SUDDENLY he was on his feet. He heard a buzz like the starting of a siren. Coming from the plane that stood a hundred feet away. A hand inertia starter being wound up inside the cockpit, he knew. Then he remembered the wounded bandit. The thug he had shot in the leg. The man was trying to take off. And he needed that blue plane himself, needed to get rid of the man inside of it.

Cliff hurdled over his burned ship. Like a destructive wind he raced across that space. Just as the motor popped to life he threw himself against the cabin door.

His hand slipped off the handle. The gun fell from his grasp. He let the weapon go. Clutching the knob with both hands, he flung the door open. The plane was moving. Then he leaped inside. The door banged shut after him.

Cliff heard a fierce growling curse. He saw the big man up front turn in the seat. The muzzle of a pistol was level with his eyes. Quickly he twisted sidewise. Flame spurted from the round, black hole. In the tight cabin the roar drowned out the loud spluttering of the motor.

With his long arm stretching far out Cliff propelled himself ahead. He struck the pistol as the man fired the second time. Grasping the gun wrist he shot his other hand through to the switch and cut the motor. A hard fist smashed into his face. He staggered backward, still retaining his hold on

the wrist. Again he flung himself up. In the crook of his right arm he caught the man's head.

Over the back of the seat Cliff pulled the bandit to the floor. Sharp fingernails tore at his face. A thumb and forefinger, curved like an eagle's beak and with the grip of a claw, found his nostrils. He was forced to let go. Now he tried to turn the arm under the man's back. The thug squirmed out. Cliff caught the toe of the wounded leg. Savagely he yanked the foot. A scream of frightful pain burst from the bandit's clenched teeth. The gun thudded to the floor.

Cliff released the wrist and went for the pistol. The robber threw himself upon it. Arms and legs locked in the deadly grapple, they rolled to the rear of the cabin. Cliff began to feel the crushing power of the man's arms. Yellow spots began to dance in front of his eyes. His brain whirled dizzily. The air, charged with the gun smoke, was peppery. His heart pounded with suffocating pangs. He shook his head and tugged to free his arms.

Finally the thug loosened his vise-like hold. Cliff saw the arm curve back. He dug his chin into the man's neck. The blow glanced off the top of his head. He kicked free. On his feet again, and the thought flashed in his mind that he couldn't fight the gorilla with his bare hands. He needed a gun. Otherwise, in another minute, the bandit would pound the life out of him.

There was the pistol up near the cockpit chair. Cliff plunged ahead to reach it. Next moment he felt his foot snagged in mid-air and he pitched on his face. Over him darted the robber for the gun.

Like a flash Cliff was up. He saw the other stooping for the weapon. On

the man's back he threw himself and from behind gripped the biceps. Together they reared to the ceiling. He felt the robber slipping from his exhausted arms.

Desperately kicking the wounded leg with his knee, Cliff pulled backward. A trick that he had learned in wrestling practice at his club. Farther back he drew the man's head. At the exact moment when both were off balance, Cliff twisted up so as to fall upon his foe. They crashed heavily to the floor. Simultaneously a gun exploded. It wasn't a loud report, for it was thickly muffled.

Under him Cliff felt the bandit stiffen in a violent convulsive movement. Then the body went suddenly limp. He rose to his knees and turned the robber face up. He saw the gun still hooked by a finger in the trigger guard, and over the man's chest a red spot was growing larger.

He wiped the sweat from his face and neck. He adjusted his collar, got to his feet, stepped over the body and lurched to the cabin door. The first breath of fresh air he sucked deep into his aching lungs.

TOO weak to jump, he sat upon the floor and eased himself to the ground. In the shade of the wing he stretched out upon his back, and lay there while strength slowly flowed back into his veins.

A mountain breeze had sprung up. The soft wind played on the sharp edges of the steel propeller blades. There was a murmuring as of soothing voices.

Cliff turned his eyes to look at the motor. Shiny, black cylinders. Looked brand-new. The nicked exhaust manifold gleamed like a mirror in the sun. Five hundred horses were there!

He liked the sweet, pulsating roar of a throaty engine. He liked to feel the rush of air on his tanned face. He liked to peer down upon the earth, with scorn in his heart for those who had to toil like moles on the ground. To soar free in the sky. That was the life!

And he knew that in five years, perhaps ten at the most, his days in the air would be over. Nobody would want to hire an old, broken-down pilot. A desk job then, if he was fortunate, or maybe hangar chief on the greasy servicing end for some transport outfit.

A smile spread over Pilot Steward's face as he thought of those things. Lying here with four million dollars. He glanced back at the cabin. Yes, plenty of room to pack in the bills—after he threw out that ape. The whole thing couldn't possibly have turned out any better. He chuckled. Sure had to fight for it. The birds knew there were millions. Tipped off, somehow.

He searched his mind for a place where he could go. Wouldn't do to bury the stuff around here. Somebody might find it. Plenty of hills to the west. Nevada was close by. Lot of desert rats there digging for gold and learning to talk with rattlesnakes. Well, he could stand it for a year. Then come out with a reputation for hidden gold like Death Valley Scotty. Better begin moving.

Cliff swung to his feet. He stretched his arms and flexed his knees. His muscles felt a little stiff, but the old strength was there. With long, rapid strides he approached his burned plane.

Here were the two dead bandits. He stood between them, looking from one to the other, as if they were nothing but motors gone haywire and waiting to be overhauled.

"Tried to steal my money, you buzzards!" he said to them.

Then a peculiar thought struck Cliff Steward. Probably it was the sound of his own voice, or the utterance of the word "steal," that shocked his lulled conscience awake. He looked about quickly, like a guilty man who isn't certain that he has committed a crime without hidden eyes having watched him. He fell back a step and passed a hand across his eyes. On his feet he rocked unsteadily.

"No, not my money," he told himself slowly. "There isn't a cent of it that belongs to me. It's money that thousands have sweated and worked for to provide a nest egg for the days

when they can no longer work. And these dirty whelps tried to steal it." Angrily he looked at the huddled figures at his feet. "Can't be done!" he mused. "Something always happens, then the jig is up."

He threw his head far back. His clear eyes swept the vast trackless vault which was home to him.

"Riding up there lonely in the sky day after day a fellow sometimes gets crazy ideas in his head."

Pilot Cliff Steward said this to himself because, having been fearfully tried, he knew for sure that he was above temptation.

THE END.

Islands of Exile

SEVERAL nations use one of their island possessions as a penal settlement, to which their worst criminals are sentenced. The best known of these is that maintained by the French at Devil's Island near Cayenne in French Guiana, South America. This prison island has been written about time and again in feature articles, and has been used by many authors as a scene for adventure stories. The French also had another convict settlement at the other side of the world, on the Pacific Ocean at New Caledonia. Italy, Portugal, Mexico and Brazil are other countries who send their trouble makers to similar island prisons.

Italy's island of exile is Lipari, an island about fifteen miles in circumference located a short distance north of Sicily. This island is used only for political offenders. The coast is patrolled every hour of the day and night by fast motor boats armed with machine guns.

Portugal sends all its desperadoes to tropical Timor in the East Indies. Once a year the prison ship makes a journey with a new load, stopping on the way at Portugal's African colonies to pick up their criminals.

Mexico, too, is solving the problem of bandits by sending all her most desperate criminals to Las Tres Marias island, located off the west coast opposite Tepic. These islands are of a volcanic nature and small earthquakes are fairly common.

Brazil also has her murderers' colony, Fernando Noronha, an isolated island far out in the South Atlantic, where they serve out their time under the charge of a Brazilian governor and a small guard of soldiers. Hundreds of miles of open sea separate the island from the nearest land.

John H. Spicer.

7 A



Nick made a desperate effort to break free

Easy to Kill

Even Mme. Storey, the famous detective, failed to rouse the police when the idolized but many-faced Nick Van Tassel prepared to shock Newport with another murder

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Death Notice," "The Butlers' Ball," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PREYING on aged millionaires of Newport, a blackmailer known as the Leveller was extorting huge sums of money and making life a hell of fear for a number of timid old men. For the Leveller—whoever he might be—seemed to know every one in Newport, and to have entry to every mansion. And his victims knew only too well that those who would not pay were murdered—frightened to death by some device they could only picture in their tortured minds.

Not one of these victims ever mentioned the Leveller; they were too afraid

of him. But the wife of Howard Van Tassel at last sent for one of the country's shrewdest detectives—Mme. Storey. At once Mme. Storey advised giving the affair full publicity and asking for police protection. They refused, and shortly afterward old Howard Van Tassel was found dead, with an expression of terror stamped on his face. Mrs. Van Tassel discharged Mme. Storey, who decided to carry on the investigation herself, working from the home of a friend, Mrs. Lysaght. Her secretary Bella (who tells the story) was to help.

This story began in the *Argosy* for August 8.

At once she was flung a challenge by the Leveller himself. It had not been hard to learn that the blackmailer was no one but Nick Van Tassel, a young daredevil who spent a million a year and was the idol of the whole colony. Working with him were a group of friends from some of the oldest families, all under the spell of his personality: Bill Kipp, Reggie Margatt, Ann Lewiston, Evelyn Surdam, others. All of them knew that Mme. Storey had taken up Nick's challenge, but none feared her much. Nick was too clever to let fall any vital evidence, and too influential to be convicted anyhow.

Nick tried to drive Mme. Storey out of Newport by means of a social boycott; when that failed he invited her and Bella to stay at his farm, the Dump, so that he could watch them better, which they were glad enough to do. Playing the part of a leisurely guest, Mme. Storey was learning more about Nick every day, and laying plans.

She suspected that another of the Leveller's victims was the eighty-year-old dandy Gibbs Cumberland, but when she proposed that he help trap the criminal, the faint-hearted millionaire invented a charge against her, and had her thrown in jail. It was necessary to tell the whole story to District Attorney Lyle—a petty, boot-licking politician who refused to believe in Nick's crimes, but who opened the jail doors at once when Mme. Storey threatened to go to the newspapers. Lyle flatly refused to take action on the evidence at hand.

Yet when Mme. Storey and Bella returned to Nick's farm, it became clear that action must be taken. One of the blackmail victims had evidently refused to pay. Murder was in the air. A big dance was to be held that night—the

Leveller's usual alibi. Again they asked the district attorney to arrest Nick, but he curtly refused.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUTSIDE THE LAW.

AS we were leaving the courthouse in Providence after our disappointing talk with the district attorney, I asked Mme. Storey:

"What did you mean when you told Lyle that you would take your own measures?"

"I mean taking Nick into custody, ourselves," she said coolly, "and keeping him until the danger is past. If the law won't take the trouble to prevent a murder, at least we can."

"What!" I exclaimed. Then my spirits rebounded. "Why, that's the answer! After all, he's just a man, like any other." And then another thought chilled me. "But we couldn't keep him very long," I faltered. "What then?"

"No use worrying about that now," she said casually.

Before returning to the Dump, we went on to Newport to confer with Crider, and lay out a plan for the evening.

We were all sitting around in the den sipping coffee and liqueurs before going on to the dance at the Chowder Club. Nick and his set always liked to make a late and effective entrance anywhere.

Ann Lewiston, sitting at Nick's desk, suddenly said:

"Why, Nick, there's a secret compartment in the middle of this desk! How do you get into it?"

"Nothing secret about it," said Nick lazily.

She moved the blotter to one side, and lifted the center flap, bringing the typewriter into view. "Oh, a typewriter!" she cried. "How cunning! I didn't know you could typewrite."

"Useful accomplishment," said Nick.

"I've always been dying to learn how to typewrite!" she exclaimed. "Do give me a lesson."

Nick arose with a good-natured air, and inserting a sheet of paper in the machine, told her to go ahead and do her worst.

"All you have to do is to strike the letters," he said.

"If she knows her letters," put in Bill.

Ann made a face at him. "What shall I write?" she asked at large.

"Such a concatenation of events is inconceivable," chanted Reggie.

"Go on!" she said. "Tell me another!"

"Oh, where and oh, where has my little dog gone?" sang Bill.

Ann commenced to spell out the words laboriously.

The whole scene rang a little false in my ears. It did not seem possible that Ann could have been ignorant of the existence of the machine. Moreover, the kittenish air she was displaying was not natural to her. I wondered with a sinking heart if the scene was being staged for our benefit. If Nick had discovered the trap we had set for him, it would be just like him to let us know it in this manner. I waited anxiously for confirmation.

Presently Ann said: "Nick, some of the letters print crookedly."

"That can't be," he answered carelessly. "I've only had the thing a few weeks."

"Come and look," she said, "the e, the r, the t, the y, the o."

He went and looked over her shoulder. It seemed to me that the room grew very still, and my breath failed me a little. But their voices had sounded so casual I could not be sure yet.

Then Reggie Margatt drawled in his unpleasant voice: "Funny; if you transpose those letters they make Mme. Storey's name, lacking only the s."

By that I knew that they knew. My skin prickled all over. I wondered if a general show-down was coming. There we were, Mme. Storey and I, helpless in Nick Van Tassel's house, surrounded by his gang and his servants. I had a moment of perfect fear. I dared not look at my employer.

She laughed lightly. "What an odd coincidence!"

"Oh, what the devil!" said Nick. "It can easily be fixed... Come on, let's go to the dance."

So he was at his old game of playing with us like a cat with mice! I ventured to breathe again. At any rate, we would be safe at the crowded dance.

Just before we set out two extra young men came to balance the sexes. We went in two of Nick's limousines; Ann, Evelyn, Mary Burne, Bill and Reggie in the first; Mme. Storey, Nick, the two new young men whose names I have forgotten, and I in the second. Nick, Mme. Storey and I were occupying the back seat in that order. The two young men, I remember, were impressed with Nick's greatness, and Nick was showing off a little. One of them had asked him how many cars he had, and he answered:

"Don't ask me! The Dump is all cluttered up with cars. I've been meaning for a long time to weed them out, and have an auction."

As we turned into the club grounds, Nick said in his warm, persuasive

voice: "Give me the two first dances, Rosika."

"Charmed," she said, and at the same time pressed my hand twice. This was to convey to me that I should tell our men she would lead Nick out of the clubhouse and into our trap during the second dance.

IN spite of its plebeian name, the Chowder Club is one of the smartest institutions in Newport. It occupies a rocky promontory sticking out into the bay and is almost completely surrounded by water. The clubhouse is a wide-spreading one-story building with deep verandas. The whole summit of the promontory is surrounded by a stout rustic fence of cedar logs to keep the members from rolling down the smooth rock slopes into the water.

We were late arrivals, and there must have been upward of a hundred cars parked all around the open space in front of the clubhouse and along both sides of the wide approach, each car with its rear bumper against the cedar fence, ready to start without interference. Mme. Storey pressed my hand again and, following the direction of her glance, I understood that she was calling my attention to a convertible coupé, painted maroon, and bearing a Maryland license. It was one of the first cars in line, farthest from the clubhouse.

In getting out, my employer and I were left alone for a moment, and I asked: "What about the coupé with the Maryland license?"

She said: "That's the car that Nick means to conduct his operations in to-night."

"How can you be sure?"

"I looked into the machine shop after lunch and saw them overhauling it."

As we mounted the steps, I saw George Stephens lolling against a post. He was our liaison officer for the evening.

He was a handsome young fellow, and looked perfectly at home in that crowd. He had been given the job because both Crider and Benny Abell had been working inside the Van Tassel house on the night of the murder, and Nick Van Tassel might have spotted them. But he could not have known Stephens.

I hung back a little, and Stephens slipped up beside me. I whispered Mme. Storey's message to him, and he went off to pass it to Crider, Abell and Scarfe, who were concealed among the cars below. Their job, of course, would be to seize Nick when Mme. Storey led him away from the clubhouse.

Crider had hired a large Cadillac sedan for the evening. It was an old model and the bloom was off it, but mechanically it was in perfect order.

Nick and Mme. Storey danced. Amidst that smart and well-dressed crowd Nick stood out with a peculiar distinction. He was not the handsomest man present, but there was a certain air of arrogance about him none could match.

There was that in his disarming smile which forced men and women alike to yield him a kind of slavish admiration. His whole crowd shared in his reflected glory; Ann, Evelyn, Mary and the men. Among the young people, this little circle was looked upon as the most desirable in Newport.

I presently noticed that Ann and Reggie had disappeared from view, though I did not see them go. They did not return. Sent on outpost duty, I assumed. On such occasions I had good reason to believe that the aristo-

cratic Ann donned boy's clothes. She had the figure of a graceful stripling.

AT the beginning of the second dance I pleaded heat to the nameless young man who was squiring me, as an excuse to get him out on the veranda. We took up our stand at the head of the steps, and pretty soon Nick and Mme. Storey came strolling along. I heard her say: "Oh, for a breath of fresh air and a glimpse of the stars!"

"Sure!" said Nick. "Let's stroll down the drive."

My heart began to beat fast. If all went well, Nick was presently due to see some stars that were not in the firmament.

Before he went down the steps he turned around to speak to one of the club servants. He pressed something into the man's hand. It looked as if he were tipping him, but I kept my eye on the fellow, and presently I saw him unfold a note. Nick had his spies and accomplices everywhere, and they served him with the sort of devotion money couldn't buy.

But this one was careless. He threw away the note, and I marked where it fell. On the pretext that I wanted to watch the dancers through the window, I moved over and put my foot on it; and presently I picked it up. Spreading it out unseen by my partner, I read:

"When I have gone a hundred yards come after me and tell me I am wanted on the telephone."

My hopes collapsed. The uncanny feeling returned to me that Nick bore a charmed existence. Apparently he was able to foresee every move we made. We could not touch him.

The servant came out of the building again and went down the drive after Nick. Soon they were to be seen

returning. Mme. Storey paused at my side, while Nick went inside to answer his imaginary telephone call. I got rid of my partner by sending him for a glass of punch, and I told my employer what had happened.

She laughed. "Well, we must try something else," she said.

After a moment's thought she went on: "Tell Stephens to tell Crider to find the convertible coupé with the Maryland license. He is to cut the wires leading to the main switch. If the doors are locked, let him raise the hood and cut the wires leading from the distributor. Crider and the other two are then to conceal themselves in the vicinity of that car and wait for Nick. Let them move their own car as near as possible to the coupé, so they won't have so far to carry him."

Nick returned, saying: "The call wasn't of the slightest importance. What a sell! Let's finish this dance."

Later Nick danced with Mary Burne and with Evelyn. Wherever his tall figure moved he was followed by those curious glances, half admiring, half resentful, that he alone had the power of evoking. Apparently he made all the other young men feel inferior. Evelyn, while she was dancing with him, in spite of her training could not keep the rapt look out of her eyes.

UPON finishing their dance these two went out on the veranda, where they ensconced themselves in the darkest corner on the bay side. This looked as if they might be intending to repeat the trick that had been played at the Van Tassel house. Mme. Storey and I watched them as closely as we were able without calling attention to ourselves.

At her suggestion we fetched Stephens, and the three of us strolled

as near as we could. She whispered to Stephens to strike a match and light a cigarette. In its brief flare we perceived that the substitution had already been effected. It was Bill Kipp who sat beside Evelyn. Nick apparently had gone over the rail.

Making our way around the veranda as quickly as possible, we descended the steps. Couples were strolling back and forth across the open space in front of the clubhouse, but the driveway beyond was deserted. It was a warm night with a haze rising from the cold water; no moon. We quickened our steps. When we came within sight of the maroon coupé we saw that it was still empty. Nick had to creep around over the rocks below the fence, and that was how we had beat him to it. We slipped behind another car where we could watch the coupé through the windows, ourselves unseen.

In a moment we saw Nick creep under the fence and unlock his car. He softly closed the door and stepped on the starter. We could hear it whirl, but of course nothing happened.

Then three more figures seemed to rise from the ground without a sound. At sight of them Nick pressed the catch that locked his door on the inside, and ran up the glass. For the moment both sides were helpless. Our men could not reach Nick, and Nick could not make his engine go.

It was the resourceful Benny Abell who broke the deadlock. I saw him scramble up over the rear compartment of the coupé. I could not guess what he was after until I saw his arm make wide, slashing movements—he must have had a knife as sharp as a razor. He cut out three sides of a square in the back of the khaki top, and the piece dropped down.

Crider joined Benny; they reached

inside the car and started hauling Nick out by main strength. Nick struggled furiously, but made no outcry. There was surprisingly little noise. Neither party to this fight could afford to call attention to it. Scarfe got his hands on Nick also, and the tall figure was drawn clear of the car in spite of his struggles. All four of them rolled down over the back of the car and hit the ground with a thud. Nick broke free, and vaulted over the fence like a flash. The others ducked after him.

We ran to the fence between two cars and looked over. Stephens slipped under the rail to go to the aid of his comrades. There was a confused struggle on the flat rock below. Apparently Nick was giving a good account of himself against such heavy odds. I heard the impact of fists on bare flesh. They moved closer to us, and I could distinguish the one figure swinging his long arms, and hear him cursing softly.

There was one moment when he actually had them all down, and leaped for the fence directly where we were standing. But some one caught him by a foot and he crashed down on the rock. Even so it was not yet over. He wrenched himself free and rolled away to one side. He got to his feet and stood with his back to the fence. I could hear his hoarse panting.

His assailants divided, and two of them came at him from each side. That was the end. Like dogs they pulled him down. There was something final in the way all four of them silently dropped on his prostrate body. Even then Nick never uttered a sound. There was a sort of fumbling struggle on the rock, then the four men arose, leaving Nick lying motionless. I thought they had killed him.

"Blindfolded, gagged, and tied up," Mme. Storey murmured reassuringly.

We heard the sound of running feet, and she whispered quickly: "Carry him down out of sight!"

Snatching up the helpless body, they disappeared as quietly as shadows into the mist.

Several chauffeurs ran up to us.

"What's the matter, lady?" one asked.

"There were some men fighting down there," said Mme. Storey. "They went that way." She pointed to the right.

They ducked under the fence and followed her direction, while we quietly turned the other way. Our Cadillac was now the last car parked on that side of the drive. We stood beside it, waiting, until the four men appeared with their burden. They passed him under the rail and swung him into the back of the car. Mme. Storey, Stephens and I climbed over him, while the other three squeezed into the front seat, and we started.

As the car began to move, somebody from up the line hailed us. Crider merely stepped on the gas. A pair of headlights flashed on and a car turned out to follow us. But it was only a half-hearted pursuit. We soon lost it in the streets of the town.

CHAPTER XV.

A CROWDED HOUR.

"**W**HERE shall I take him?" asked Crider, who was driving.

Mme. Storey leaned forward to keep her voice from carrying to the prisoner's ears. "It doesn't matter," she whispered. "Drive around for an hour."

We rolled at a quiet pace through the deserted streets of the town and out by what they call the West Road,

one of the two highways that connect the island of Rhode Island with the mainland. This route carried us past the public airport, a golf course and the ancient windmill with its long arms, that is one of the sights of the neighborhood.

Benny Abell unbuttoned his coat and produced a pair of curious objects that he had thrust inside.

"Found these in his car," he said. "Thought they might be useful as evidence."

It was a pair of heavy wooden sandals that strapped on over the ordinary shoes.

There was a row of short steel spikes projecting from the square toe and a row of longer spikes from under the ball of the foot, inclining forward and forming a sort of fulcrum.

"With these," said Mme. Storey, "he could go straight up the side of a wooden house, if he had a rain-leader or any other projection to steady himself . . . Search him," she added to Stephens.

This was not altogether easy while Nick was lying huddled in the bottom of the car, but Stephens went about it systematically.

"Take his money, too," said Mme. Storey. "It can be returned to him."

Stephens produced in turn a wallet, a handful of change, a pocket flash, a gun and a curious furry object that at first we could not identify. Mme. Storey handed the gun to me to keep. It was an old-fashioned six-shooter of thirty-eight caliber, a formidable weapon. I shoved it in my stocking.

She turned on the dome light, and we saw that the furry object was an ingeniously made wig, mask and beard all in one. The wig part represented a completely bald pate, and when Nick drew it on and fastened it he must have

been a truly horrible object, and of course entirely unrecognizable.

Meanwhile Nick was groaning protestingly under his gag, and since we had left the town far behind, Mme. Storey whispered to Stephens to tell him we would take the gag off, but that if he made any outcry it would have to go back again.

The gag was removed, and Nick rubbed his sore mouth gratefully against his shoulder.

"Why do I have to lie here under your feet?" he said sullenly. "Can't you stick me in the corner of the seat?"

Mme. Storey could not deny a defeated enemy this small favor, and between them she and Stephens yanked him up and propped him in the corner. Smiling, she stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lighted it, but after a puff or two he said:

"Throw it away. It's no good when you can't see the smoke."

After a while he said, with restored good humor: "What's to be gained by keeping me in blinders anyhow? I know perfectly well that I am riding with the adorable Rosika. I smelled her perfume when she lifted me up. What is its seductive name? 'Adieu Sagesse'!"

Mme. Storey laughed and told Stephens to take off the blind. It was done, their eyes met, and both laughed. There was an extraordinary relation between those two. Each admired the other immensely, and neither would give an inch. Nick would have shot her down as gladly as she would have sent him to the chair.

"All right, lady," said Nick, perfectly good-humored. "My turn will come!" A while later he said ironically: "If it's a fair question, darling, why are you taking me for this delight-

ful drive with all your gentlemen friends?"

"I don't mind telling you," she said, "if you will tell me where you were going to-night in the convertible coupé."

"That's easy," he said. "I've got a girl in the town. She's not in society, so I call on her secretly. You're a woman of the world; you understand these things."

"Is it necessary to take a pair of climbers, a gun and a false face when you call on her?" she asked.

He ignored the question and countered: "You have not answered me yet."

"I shall answer you more truthfully than you answered me," she returned. "I am taking you for this ride to keep you out of mischief."

"Good of you," he said.

WE crossed the great Mount Hope suspension bridge, high above the water, and passed through the quiet streets of Bristol. Mme. Storey soon gave the word to return. In taking Nick's climbers, gun and mask, she considered that she had rendered him harmless at least for the balance of the night. She told Stephens to untie his wrists and ankles.

"There are six of us and all armed," she said suggestively.

"You wouldn't dare shoot me, darling," he said, grinning. "At any rate, not in Newport County."

"Don't try me too far," she retorted, smiling back. "It has occurred to me more than once it would be the best way out."

After a while he asked: "Well, now you have me, what are you going to do with me?"

"It's quite a problem," said Mme. Storey dryly.

"Yes. The district attorney won't entertain charges against me"—so he already knew that!—"and if you tried to turn me over to the police they'd set me free and arrest you for lese majesty or something."

"Perhaps they would," she said equably. "At any rate I'm not going to risk it."

"Then what are you going to do with me?"

"When we come within five miles of the Dump I shall put you out and let you walk home."

Oddly enough, this angered him as no threat of danger could have done. To the arrogant Nick, who hated setting foot to the ground, the idea of being forced to foot it along the highway like a common tramp was intolerable.

"Damn it, that's not sporting!" he cried. "That's a mean and petty advantage to take of me. It's humiliating! Look at the state I'm in!"

It was true his white shirt front was all slimed from having been rubbed against the wet rocks; his collar was torn, his coat ripped, his face bruised. He had lost his hat, of course, and his black hair was wildly tousled. He looked like anything but the darling of Newport then.

"One of my boys will lend you a hat and coat," said Mme. Storey.

"Take me some place where I can hire a car!" he cried.

"It would not suit my plans," she answered calmly.

Sure enough, soon after we had returned over the suspension bridge, she forced him to get out in the road. In Benny Abell's hat, which was too big for him, and Benny Abell's topcoat, which was too short, he was an exquisitely comic figure. We had a good laugh at his expense. We left him grinding his teeth and cursing. He had

no money to hire a conveyance, and it was hardly likely anybody would stop and pick him up at that time of night.

"Where next?" asked Crider, when we drove on.

"To the Dump."

"It's dangerous," he said, scowling.

"I left jewels there and other things I want to secure," she said. "I also want the typewriter, if it has not been made away with. It is my only evidence. Afterward you can drive us to a hotel."

In ten minutes we were there. The big house was dark except for lights in the corridors, and no cars were parked in the drive. When Mme. Storey and I got out, the Cadillac turned around and drove off as if to return to town, but it had been instructed to wait just out of sight of the front door. It was about one o'clock, and the watchman was on duty in the lower hall. This was an able-looking ex-pugilist known as Jack White.

"Has Mr. Van Tassel come home?" asked Mme. Storey affably.

"No, ma'am."

"Any of his friends here?"

"No, ma'am. I understand they're all at the Chowder Club. Nobody in the house but the servants, ma'am."

"We're going to bed," she said, smothering a yawn.

"How will we get past him going out?" I whispered on the stairs.

"We'll go down by the back stairs and the service entry."

In our bedrooms we secured the most valuable of our belongings, and we also got long coats to replace the wraps left in the Chowder Club cloakroom. Also we put on hats which somehow render women less conspicuous at night. Then we stole noiselessly back along the corridor to the den. The corridor was lighted; but the big room was dark.

"Do you know how the typewriter is fastened to the desk?" whispered Mme. Storey.

"Sure," I said; "a couple of hooks over the frame that are fastened by thumbscrews below. I can release it in the dark."

"Good!" she said.

However, as soon as I raised the flap of the desk I realized that our errand was in vain. "It's gone!" I said.

"Well, that was only to be expected," she said serenely. "Come on!"

AT that moment the electric light switch clicked, and the lights flooded on. Between us and the way out stood Nick's five friends. Bill Kipp had a gun in his hand. They must have been pressed back into the recesses on either side of the fireplace when we entered. Reggie Margatt was in rough clothes like a gardener, and Ann Lewiston was wearing a boy's suit. Even at that moment of terror I took note of what a handsome lad she made.

"What are you trying to pull off?" asked Reggie with a hateful sneer; "a little burglary?"

Mme. Storey made no answer. I saw her measuring the distance to the central window out of the corner of her eye. There was a small balcony outside. Unfortunately the window was closed.

"Where's Nick?" demanded Evelyn in a strained, high-pitched voice.

"How should I know?" said Mme. Storey.

"You do know! You carried him away from the club! What have you done with him?"

"He is unhurt," said Mme. Storey coolly.

"He had better be!"

Mme. Storey sprang to the window.

Reggie, instantly after her, caught her by the shoulders, but not before she had succeeded in kicking out a pane of glass.

"Crider! Benny!" she cried. "Come!"

At the same instant Bill shouted downstairs: "Bolt the door!"

I ran to my employer's assistance. Before I could reach her a heavy velvet portière was thrown over my head blinding and almost suffocating me. I was pulled down to the ground; a cord of some sort was thrown around and around my body, and I found myself entirely helpless. As I heard no sounds of struggle I judged that Mme. Storey had been treated in the same manner.

A voice said: "Quick! Down the back stairs with them!"

As we were carried out of the room, I heard a crash of glass down stairs, from which I gathered that our friends were coming in through the windows. Several shots followed, filling me with a sickening anxiety. Meanwhile we were being carried rapidly down the corridor past our rooms and on down the service stairs.

There must have been a car standing outside the service entrance, for we were instantly thrown in the back, our captors piled in, and we started. This car was equipped with a cut-out which was open, and we sped around the house and struck into the main drive beyond, making a tremendous roar. I could not understand why they were thus attracting attention to themselves, until I heard one of them say with satisfaction: "Here they come!" Then I knew they were trying to draw our friends away from the house.

Somebody said: "Put out the lights!" Immediately afterward, judging from the motion of the car, we made a complete circle and, I suppose, stole back through the gates and turning out of the drive, bumped slowly

over the field. Behind us I heard the sound of another car driven rapidly, and somebody said with a laugh: "There they go into Newport looking for us." Our car stopped, and they held a consultation over us.

"What shall we do with them?"

"Throw them in the river," snarled Reggie.

"No!" cried Evelyn. "We can't do that without Nick's say-so."

"Take them back into the house!"

"No! They may have left a man on watch there. They may come back."

"Carry them up to the sail-loft," said Reggie's voice. "If any of their men come around, we can run these two aboard the Bonito and carry them out to sea. Let Evelyn, Bill and Mary watch over them while Ann and I go look for Nick."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE BALANCE.

I HAD been carried up an outside stairway, through a door and laid down on a board floor. Mme. Storey I knew was near, because I had heard her body drop beside me. There was a long wait. Finding it useless to struggle against the cords that bound me, I submitted to my fate. I had fallen into a kind of lethargy in which one felt neither hope nor fear.

Finally I heard Ann and Reggie come back bringing Nick. The sound of Nick's voice made me fearful again. He and his friends whispered together, and I could not hear a word.

Beside me Mme. Storey began to moan feebly, and to cry for water. Knowing her as well as I did, I suspected she was not as badly off as she sounded. Evelyn's voice answered her.

"There's no water up here."

"Take this thing off my head or I'll suffocate!" moaned Mme. Storey.

Evelyn approached us, and I heard the rip of goods alongside me. Presently she cut away the heavy velvet that swathed my head and I came out into the blessed air once more. I saw that Evelyn had one of the specially shaped knives that sail-makers use. She returned to her friends without speaking to us.

Nick said: "Well, Rosika, I told you my turn would come." He grinned evilly. He had not forgiven her his enforced walk along the highway.

"One good turn deserves another," she answered. "Cut me loose."

He turned his back on us.

Finding that I could see and hear again; could even whisper to my employer lying beside me, a measure of courage returned to me. I hastily took stock of our surroundings. We were lying on the floor of the sail-loft over the yacht-rigging shop. It was a polished hardwood floor, so that the canvas would slip over it easily. Great piles of snowy half-finished sails were lying about.

As I had noticed before, this building was a barnlike structure in early American style. The roof ran up into a sharp peak over our heads. I remembered how it swept down almost to the ground in the rear, over a lean-to addition to the shop below. There was a row of dormer windows down each side of the loft. They were covered with pieces of canvas at present, to keep the light from showing through. The loft was lighted by a line of naked electric bulbs suspended down the center.

Mme. Storey and I were lying near the door. Nick and his five friends moved to the other side of the loft to consult together. They lowered their

voices, but as the talk went on they became excited and in the stillness under the high roof I could hear almost every word. It gave me a sickening turn when I realized that our lives depended on it.

I heard Reggie say: "We've got to put them out, or they'll certainly do for us!"

"No!" said Evelyn. "Our best hope of safety lies in turning them loose. They've got nothing on us. The typewriter's in the river. They've got nothing on us, and they can't get anything."

"Don't listen to Evelyn," put in Ann. "She's chicken-hearted. She'd argue anything to keep from stepping on these women."

"How do you know they've got nothing on us?" Reggie demanded of Evelyn. "This woman works in the dark and strikes when she's damn' good and ready. We know she's been tampering with Gibbs Cumberland. Maybe she's approached all our people. She'll never rest until she undermines the whole racket. We've got to step on her!"

"Reggie is right!" put in Ann again. Under her slim and elegant exterior that girl harbored the spirit of a fiend.

"LISTEN to what I say!" warned Evelyn earnestly. "If Mme. Storey is put out of the way it will raise a storm throughout the country that will destroy us, evidence or no evidence!"

"Aah! Talk sense!" snarled Reggie. "You can't convict without evidence! Listen! Her men can swear that she entered Nick's house and was never seen again. What of it? None of us five was seen. They can't testify that we had anything to do with it. And Nick can prove he wasn't on the scene."

"Jack White," suggested Evelyn.

"Jack can't rat on us," said Reggie. "We've got too much on him. If he should try it we'll put him where he can't testify. He'd never be missed."

"Where is this going to end?" cried Evelyn hysterically.

"I told you so!" cried Ann. "Her nerve is gone."

"Be quiet," growled Nick. "Let Reggie finish."

"You can't prove a murder without a body," Reggie went on, "and we'll take damn' good care they are never found. Sure it will raise a storm. But it can't touch us. It will blow over in the end, and we'll be in a stronger position than ever. Look—this woman has been to Gibbs Cumberland. Maybe she's been to Eversley and that's why he didn't come across last night. Maybe she's been to all of them. Well, if she disappears now, that will put the fear of God into them, won't it? They'll be glad enough then to pay on the nail! I say we've got to put these women out or go out of business ourselves."

A voice put in: "How could we dispose of the bodies?"

"That's easy. There's plenty of sheet lead downstairs. Roll them up in that and carry them out to sea."

"Cheese it!" said Nick. "They're listening."

They moved farther away, and I could hear no more. God knows it was awful to lie there helpless, listening to the gang discussing whether or not we should be murdered—but it was worse not to hear what was said for and against. I felt as if I should go out of my mind. I heard somebody say, "Well, put it to the vote." There could be little doubt as to how the vote would go. Among the six there was only one voice raised in our favor.

Then Mme. Storey dropped a bomb-shell in my ear by whispering:

"She left the knife with me. I have cut myself free. Turn partly on your side away from me and I will cut the ropes at your back. Be careful not to disarrange them until we're ready to make a break."

I obeyed in a dazed fashion, and presently she said: "You're free. Lie on your back to conceal the cut ends of the rope. They took my gun. Have you still got yours?"

"Yes," I whispered. "It's in my stocking."

"Can you pass it to me?"

"I'll try."

The velvet portière still covered me to my feet, and under it I was able to pull up my dress a fraction of an inch at a time, and finally work my hand down into my stocking. I had to proceed with the greatest care to avoid pulling out the loose ends of the rope from under me. I got my hand on the gun and edged it out little by little. Still under cover of the portière, I passed it over to Mme. Storey's side, and she secured it. She whispered:

"Lie perfectly still until the lights go out. Then jump for the window immediately over your head. I know the windows are open because I saw the canvas move. I'll take the next one. Remember the roof of the lean-to is almost flat and comes down to within seven feet of the ground. Won't hurt you to drop off. If we become separated meet me behind the first hangar."

A QUARREL broke out among the gang; perhaps it was over the best method of giving us our quietus. They disputed in angry whispers and forgot to watch us as closely as before. Glancing at Mme. Storey I

saw that she had turned partly on her side and had drawn up her right hand with the pistol to take aim. Her body still hid the pistol from any of the gang who might glance in our direction. Apparently she was going to fire at the door, which seemed senseless to me: then I saw the electric light switch beside it.

The shot roared under the roof, and was echoed by another report and a flash of blue flame from the switch. The loft was plunged in blackness. A yell broke simultaneously from the six throats of the gang, and they made for us as one.

"Quick! Roll back under the eaves until they pass," whispered Mme. Storey.

They fumbled blindly for us in the darkness, continually falling over each other.

"Reggie and Bill!" roared Nick. "Hold the door! There's no other way out!"

"I'm here!" answered Reggie grimly.

"Try the switch!"

"It's burned out!"

The search moved away from me a little, and I sprang for the window, and somehow precipitated myself out on the roof. I went down the steep part like a projectile, but slowed myself on the flatter part by spreading out arms and legs. Some one was above me at the window. Fearing a shot, I rolled off to one side. In my confusion I rolled the wrong way. There was no shot, but another body came hurtling down the roof and passed me. When I dropped to the ground it was between me and Mme. Storey.

Somebody clutched hold of me in the dark, and a shrill voice cried out: "Nick, I've got one of them! I've got one of them!"

This was little Mary Burne. She had nerve, to follow us like that. I wasn't afraid of her. I picked her up in my arms and flung her with all my might on the ground. She squeaked like a mechanical doll when she struck. I jumped over her body, and collided with Mme. Storey. Taking hands, we ran with all our might. We could hear the men pounding down the outside stairway, and Nick shouting orders:

"Reggie! Get a car and cut them off at the gate! . . . Bill! Watch the dock, and don't let them get a boat! Ann! Turn on the lights!"

When we came to the end of the building, instead of striking across the flying field direct for the gate, we turned to the right and ran for the hangars bounding the field on the north side. They would never expect us to go that way. What we chiefly feared was the lights. The whole field was surrounded by tall poles bearing flood-lights. We didn't know where the switch was. We strained every nerve to make the shelter of the hangars before the lights could be turned on once more.

It was a long run, and the lights came on when we had still a couple of hundred yards to go. We dropped in the grass and lay perfectly still, then crawled on our stomachs a foot at a time for the river bank. Rolling over the edge, we found partial shelter from the light on the stones below. Bent almost double, we ran over the stones, slipping and stumbling, until we had passed the hangars and were out of radius of the lights.

A short distance behind the hangars was a strip of woods that marked the boundary of Nick's property. We did not stop running until we had gained the shelter of the trees. There we flung ourselves down to give our pounding

hearts a little ease. We could hear no sounds of pursuit.

AS soon as we got our breath we resumed our way around the edge of Nick's outermost fields, passing behind the stables, and finally gaining the highway. We figured we were about five miles from town. Not exactly a pleasant prospect for a couple of lone women at two o'clock in the morning. The coats and hats we had secured in our rooms covered our conspicuous evening dresses, but our satin slippers were fouled with mud. We had lost the little valises we had taken, but Mme. Storey still had all her jewelry hanging about her under the coat. I figured she was worth between two and three hundred thousand as she stood. It made me nervous.

When we turned our faces toward town, Nick's polo field was on our left.

"They'll be watching the main gate," I said nervously.

"We'll make a detour," said Mme. Storey.

We had not gone far before we heard a car coming from the north.

"Let's flag it," said Mme. Storey. "We can't come walking into town like this."

"Oh, no!" I said in terror. "Let's hide till it passes. You don't know who it might be at this time of night."

"It can't be Nick or his friends," she said, "and that's all I'm worrying about. I'm going to risk it."

When the headlights swung around a bend behind us, she raised an arm, and the car stopped with squeaking brakes beside us. It was a shabby little sedan. Two surprised young men looked out of the front window.

"Will you give us a lift to town?" asked Mme. Storey.

"What the devil are you doing out here?" asked the one at the wheel.

She instantly took his measure, and altered her style to suit. "Aah! We didn't like the fellas we was with, and we got out and walked."

"Gee!" they said sympathetically.

Their appearance was not reassuring. Well-dressed comely little fellows scarcely out of their teens, with smooth hard faces, they were of a type that we were familiar with in New York. Probably of Italian extraction. Their anxiety to butter their harsh voices and to ingratiate themselves, made me more than ever uneasy. However, when they invited us to hop in, I had no choice but to follow my employer.

They were in no haste to proceed, but hung there at the side of the road, with the engine running, making friendly conversation. One produced a packet of cigarettes, and we lit up all around. 'I was uncomfortably aware that they were studying us sharply.

"Meet my friend Joe Mora," said the one at the wheel. "Me, I'm Pete Corioli."

"Pleased to meet ya," said Mme. Storey. "I'm Rosy Wilson, and my friend here is Bella Smith."

"Do you mean to say," asked Pete incredulously, "that any fellas would put out a coupla swell-looking girls like you in the road?"

"Take it any way you like," said Mme. Storey carelessly. "We wouldn't stay with them."

"Wasn't you scared?"

"Scared as the devil."

They laughed.

"Well, you're all right with us," said Joe. "We'll treat you good."

I didn't fancy the look in his eye when he said it.

"You don't live here," said Pete,

"or I would 'a' seen you before. I wouldn't forget a face like yours."

"Just stoppin'," said Mme. Storey vaguely.

"Where?"

"At the Allardyce-Bowles Hotel."

"Yes you are! That's where all the high muckamucks stop."

"Ain't we worth it?"

"You're all right, kid!" he said, laughing. "I'm for you! Change seats with Joe."

"Nothin' doin'!" she said coolly. "You're one fast little worker, ain't ya? Drive on, fella!"

"Drive on, nottin'," he said. "What we gonna get out of it?"

"We can still walk," she said, making a move as if to open the door. "Our legs is good."

"Aah, don't be in such a sweat," he said. "I was just funnin'. Will you eat with us in town? We live over Mike's restaurant. We'll get him up and make him cook up a big sirloin. Oh, boy, I could eat!"

"Come on!" added Joe, cajolingly. "We had a bit of luck to-night. Turned a trick up in Boston. We got the jack, girls. You better stick to us."

"O. K.," said Mme. Storey.

Pete let in his clutch.

IN a moment or two we came within sight of the main gates of Omega Farm. A big closed car was waiting in the road outside, with two or three men standing about it. Even at two hundred yards distance we could recognize the tall figure of Nick.

"There they are," said Mme. Storey to Pete. "They're layin' for us. Are you game?"

"Sure!" said Pete.

"Then give her all she'll take!"

The little car jerked ahead, and Mme. Storey and I crouched down out of

sight in the back. We could not see what was happening, but we gathered they were signalling Pete to stop, because he muttered: "You can go plumb to the devil!" When we passed them our engine was making so much noise we could only hear a confused shouting in the road.

Immediately afterward it seemed, we were enveloped in the powerful lights of the pursuing car. We had no chance against such a car. The lights grew stronger and stronger. It was like having a fiery beast at your heels. Yet the little car was bounding down the straight road. Pete and Joe were bent low in the front seat to keep out of range of possible bullets through the rear window. I expect it was not the first time they had been chased in a car.

We were swaying sickeningly. I expected a crash.

"Oh, heck! I wish I had my old Duesenberg under me!" groaned Pete. "This crate won't make but sixty-three!"

"Go it, baby! Go it!" Joe was crying to the car.

Presently I saw that the headlights were no longer streaming directly through the back window, and I realized the big car was drawing abreast of us. It held the road as solidly as a locomotive. We had no chance at all. One of Nick's chauffeurs was driving it, and Nick sat beside him. Reggie Margatt was in the back. They looked in our car and saw us, but their faces gave no sign. Mme. Storey planted herself defiantly in the seat, and I sat beside her.

"You'd better stop," she said to Pete. "They'll force us off the road."

"To the devil with them!" shouted Pete.

A moment later the two cars came

together—not hard at first, just a grinding along the running boards.

"They've got me!" cried Pete.

"There's a left curve ahead!"

"Oh, the devils!" muttered Mme. Storey.

"Hang on!" yelled Pete as we reached the bend. "Here we go!"

We left the road. I cannot clearly describe what followed. We shot down an embankment at a crazy angle, and crashed through a board fence as easily as if it had been paper. We waited for the inevitable smash-up. The little car seemed to bounce higher in the air every time it touched the ground. The successive shocks knocked all the breath out of me. Finally it crashed over on its side.

I felt it coming and braced myself against the lower side. Mme. Storey fell heavily against me and we were showered with glass. Then an unnatural silence.

"Are you hurt?" she whispered anxiously.

"No."

"Then come on!"

She already had the uppermost door open, and we had scrambled out almost before the wheels stopped turning. We saw the limousine backing to the spot in the road opposite the break in the fence about a hundred yards off. We seemed to be in a private park with ornamental trees and shrubbery. It was completely dark where we stood.

Several men jumped out of the limousine, and we did not hesitate. As we turned to run, we saw our two young friends climbing out of the front of the sedan, so we knew that they were at least not killed. We ran straight away from the men who were coming through the fence. The shrubbery soon swallowed us, and we slowed down to a walk. The sound of a noisy

altercation arose behind us. So much the better, I thought, if it hindered the search for us.

Turning at right angles we shaped a course parallel with the road as far as we could judge. Presently we came to a private driveway, and followed it back to the public road. Here we were sheltered behind an ornamental gatepost while we debated what to do next. We were, I suppose, about two hundred yards ahead of the limousine, but out of sight of it. Mme. Storey thought that if the house in this park was occupied we had better frankly apply there for refuge.

Before we could put this into effect, we heard a car coming from the direction of Newport, and waited to see what it looked like. To our joy we recognized the old Cadillac with Crider at the wheel. We ran out into the road, signaling wildly. He ground to a stop, and backed his car into the private road. That was a glorious reunion.

However, we had no time to exchange notes on the evening's performance. Somebody at the wheel of the limousine had heard the other car stop and back, and a shout was raised. Mme. Storey and I flung ourselves into the Cadillac, and we started for Newport hell for leather.

When the road straightened out we saw the limousine flying after us, but in our big sedan it found its match. It could not overhaul us. When we struck the town we slowed down, and thereafter the limousine contented itself with keeping us in view. Hardly five minutes later we drew up in front of the Allardyce-Bowles on Bellevue Avenue.

"Go right on to the garage," Mme. Storey said to Crider. "We don't want a fracas in the street. Take care of

the evidence. Bella and I will be safe here."

THE Allardyce-Bowles, as everybody knows, is one of the standbys of Newport. A congeries of mismated wooden buildings, hopelessly out-moded, it is nevertheless still the smart place at which to stop. The fireproof hotel down the street angles in vain for the fashionable trade. Well, there's something very cozy about the old Allardyce with its white-painted walls, crimson carpets, and Mid-Victorian atmosphere.

When Mme. Storey asked for the register, the sleepy clerk roused himself, and peered somewhat dubiously over the counter at our mud-incrusted slippers.

"Have you any baggage, madam?"

"I am Mme. Storey," she said haughtily. "My baggage will arrive in the morning."

He smiled disagreeably. "I am sorry, madam..."

At this moment Nick Van Tassel entered the door. He had procured a well-fitting overcoat somewhere, and his hair was combed. His face still wore that infernal smile. At the sight of him I shivered, though I believed we were safe there. The clerk greeted Nick effusively.

"Ah, Nick," said Mme. Storey coolly. "Will you identify me to this man, please? I want a room here."

He hesitated for a second, still smiling evilly, debating, I suppose, which course would better serve his interests.

Mme. Storey said quickly: "If they refuse to take me in I will telephone to the police. They are forbidden to turn travelers away."

Nick made up his mind. "What nonsense, Rosika!" he said with seeming good nature. "This lady is Mme.

Storey," he went on to the clerk. "Give her the best in the house. I will be responsible for any bills she may run here."

"Certainly, Mr. Van Tassel; certainly, sir," burred the clerk, hastily shoving the register toward us.

"I want one large room not connected with any other," said Mme. Storey.

"Yes, madam, we have the very thing. Number three hundred and seven. One of the choicest rooms in the house."

"Rosika," said Nick under his breath, "before you go upstairs come into the parlor a moment."

She shook her head.

"You will be quite safe," he whispered, smiling wickedly.

"Certainly I should be safe," she said, looking him full in the eye. "I am armed."

His good humor failed him momentarily. "You and I ought to talk things over," he said, scowling. "Best for both of us. All our cards on the table."

"I have nothing to say to you."

The lordly Nick was actually reduced to pleading for what he wanted. It did him heart good to hear it.

"Aw, Rosika, don't be a crab," he murmured with a hangdog air. "You and I are good sports. We play the game."

"But not the same game," she said, smiling.

"Aw, Rosy—"

She turned to the clerk. "Will you please show us to our room?"

To our great satisfaction the door of our bedroom was equipped with an old-fashioned bolt. No way of forcing such a bolt has yet been discovered short of breaking in the door. We shot it and turned it, and flung ourselves

across the big bed with common groans of relief.

"What a night!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FIRE!

AS our excitement died down in the quiet of our own room, Mme.

Storey and I began to realize that we had not escaped from the automobile crash so easily as we had supposed. True, neither of us had any broken bones, and by some miracle we had escaped being cut by the falling glass; but we felt as if we had been pounded all over with clubs. To move was torture.

Still there was to be no rest for us. The telephone rang, and Mme. Storey, with a groan, raised herself from the bed to answer it.

She said, "No, I won't see you," and I knew that it was Nick Van Tassel. After a moment she said: "Well, tell me over the phone." When he refused to do so, she said: "Well, that's your look-out. I have nothing to conceal." A long silence followed, broken only by Mme. Storey's muttered exclamations of impatience. Nick was evidently pleading. Finally she said: "This is merely absurd, Nick." And hung up abruptly.

"What did he say?" I asked.

"Vague threats," she said scornfully. "The man is desperate. He has never been successfully opposed before, and it has shaken his belief in himself. He is apt to strike at us blindly now."

"Surely we are safe here in the hotel," I said nervously.

"I don't know," she said thoughtfully. "He has his spies and friends everywhere in this town. At any rate,

we'll stand watch until morning. That is why I took only one room. Thank God, we still have the gun. It will be light in a couple of hours."

"Take a little rest," I urged.

She shook her head. "Got to do some telephoning first." She started looking for a number in the book.

"Who to?"

"I suppose you noticed that Reggie Margatt let slip the name of the intended victim to-night."

A light broke on me. "Henry Eversley!" I exclaimed.

She commenced the patient business of trying to get a number in the small hours of morning. "Keep on ringing, please. Yes, I know, everybody in the house is probably asleep. Keep on ringing, please. It is important."

Henry Eversley was one of the great railroad builders—or wreckers, if you like—thirty years ago. He accumulated one of the greatest fortunes in the country. In those days his name was a household word, but since suffering a stroke some years ago he has retired into seclusion and is rarely heard of. But he is just as rich as ever. His was one of the names that had already been turned up in the case. He had refused to receive Mme. Storey.

She finally succeeded in getting a servant on the phone and, as a result of persistent firmness, managed to persuade him to connect her with his master's bedside phone. When she was satisfied that she had the multimillionaire on the wire Mme. Storey said:

"This is Mme. Storey speaking. My business in Newport is to run down the letter-writer who signs himself the Leveller, and who has been extorting large sums of money from various wealthy men here. I happen to know that he sent you a demand last night, and that you refused to pay—"

Here Mr. Eversley interrupted her with a dozen questions.

"Please let me finish first . . . You refused his demand, and in consequence he planned to attack you in your house to-night. I was able to prevent that, but I cannot tell what to-morrow may bring up. So I am taking this means of warning you. Unless he is prevented, he will certainly attack you to-morrow. You should therefore take whatever measures seem best to you. He is an extremely resourceful and ingenious man, and you should leave nothing to chance. I advise you to call in the police, and publish the whole matter in the newspapers."

It appeared from the subsequent conversation that Mr. Eversley was angry. Mme. Storey expostulated with him helplessly. He accused her of being in the pay of the Leveller, and of using this early morning call as a means to frighten him into paying up. This was the result of the whispering campaign that had been instituted against us in Newport. It was passed from mouth to mouth that Mme. Storey herself was the blackmailer, and we were powerless to combat it.

Mr. Eversley kept shouting that he wouldn't pay a cent, and refused to listen to what my employer had to say. She told him that the name of his persecutor was in the hands of the district attorney, and advised him to consult Lyle. But it is doubtful if he heard her.

She finally hung up with a weary air. "Well, at any rate, I've done my duty by him," she said.

NEXT she called up Lyle at his home in Providence, and once more had to go through with the weary business of getting a servant to the phone and persuading her to call

her master. Lyle, she told me afterward, was in a villainous temper when she finally got him, nevertheless she forced him to listen to the whole story of what had happened that night.

One would have thought the attention of the operators must have been attracted by those long conversations in the small hours of morning. Mme. Storey did not name Nick over the phone; just the same, if anybody listened in, what strange matter he must have heard! But it never came out afterward. I suppose it was added to all the other strange stories, the inside dope about things that is passed along in whispers and never gets broadcast.

Lyle, as we already knew, was as pig-headed as he was timid, and made out to pooh-pooh the whole story. Mme. Storey had got no better than she deserved, he intimated, for trying to take the law into her own hands. But she beat him down with the deadly particulars. We still had Nick Van Tassel's gun, mask and pair of climbers. In the end, Lyle promised to come down to Newport first thing in the morning to consult with her.

"In the meantime," said Mme. Storey, "I think I am entitled to ask for protection. Will you telephone to the chief of police here and ask him to have this hotel sufficiently guarded until you get here?"

Lyle, still affecting to make light of the whole business, promised to do so. Whether or not he carried it out, we never knew.

I persuaded Mme. Storey to lie down on the bed and take a sleep while I kept watch for daylight in the armchair. Neither of us took off any of our clothes. My employer was asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

I sat in the chair with the pistol in

my lap and all my nerves taut, listening, watching for I knew not what. We had a front corner room on the third floor. It had two windows looking out on Bellevue Avenue, and a third to the side. No other doors but the one on the corridor with the stout bolt. An old-fashioned wardrobe for clothes.

At first I left the lights burning. A dozen times I got up and peeped around the window blinds. Nobody could have entered that way without a ladder. Then I would go to the door and listen, and reassure myself by trying the bolt. Not a sound outside. I decided it was the lights that were making me nervous, and turned them out. Then I no longer felt as if I were making a target for somebody's bullet. When I ran up the window blinds I was assured nobody could appear outside without giving me warning. The windows were open, and had screens. Nothing stirred in the street below.

I never would have believed it possible in the state I was in, but I fell asleep myself. I fell asleep while I imagined I was still sitting up watching and listening. Well, we had been through a terrific strain. I must have slept soundly too, for I did not awaken until the full alarm was raised. I came back to consciousness with a hideous start, hearing doors slam, women screaming, and that most dreadful of all cries in the night:

"Fire!"

Mme. Storey sprang up at the same moment. My fears of Nick Van Tassel paled beside those dreadful sounds. I ran to the door. I switched on the lights, and threw back the bolt. But the door resisted me. Shake it as I might, it was stoutly held.

"Oh, God!" I screamed. "We're locked in! We're trapped!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



He swung with both hands and all his strength

The Parrot

*Not even the Jamaica parrot he had bought for a silver dollar felt
as much like cursing as did young Jabez Bunting when
he thought of his usurer uncle's persecutions*

By THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

YOUNG Jabez Bunting purchased the parrot for a silver dollar from a ragged, seafaring man with a cast in his right eye and gold rings in his ears. It was a high price for a parrot, in that day and place—Jamaica in the early eighteen-hundreds. Moreover, young Bunting was a thrifty New Englander by birth—but the ragged sailor said, "There ain't the beat o' this yere bird for free speech this side Hades," and the bird showed its appreciation of the statement and the situation with a verbal volley which thrilled Jabez and caused even the seaman to blink his normal eye.

Jabez carried the parrot home in a basket. The young man's home was a sugar plantation lying six miles to the westward of the port of Kingston. The parrot gave four demonstrations of his command of languages during the homeward ride, and Jabez's saddle mule bolted off the road and into the crops every time.

But Jabez liked it. Anything for a change, was the way the young man felt, for he was weary unto nervous exhaustion of the dismal, carping, unctuous bleatings of his Uncle Amos, preachings which stank of hypocrisy through a varnish of pious phraseology.

The unbridled profanity of the bird sounded wholesome and honest in contrast to the sanctimonious blather of Amos Bunting—to one who knew the heart and ways of Amos. The blood-curdling curses and oaths of the bird constituted the lesser blasphemy.

The firm of A. & A. Bunting, of Boston and Kingston, dealt openly and extensively in the products of tropical plantations and northern forests and fisheries, and less conspicuously in usury and slavery. God help the borrower, the slave and even the indentured servant who stumbled into the coils of Andrew and Amos Bunting.

Andrew, the elder brother and senior partner and father of young Jabez, attended to the northern end of the business, with a counting-house and warehouses and a fine residence in Boston. Amos, a bachelor, attended to the tropical end of the trade, kept his counting-house in Kingston, within a biscuit toss of the harbor-front, and resided in two hot and shabby rooms over his office.

Jabez, who had worn out three of his nineteen years of life as an apprentice to the Bunting firm, learning the mysteries of the Jamaican end of the business, was now manager in name, of the Windmill Creek plantation, though in fact, the management was still very much under the sharp eyes and prying nose of Uncle Amos.

Windmill Creek was but one of six or seven sugar-producing properties that had come into the possession of A. & A. Bunting in the course of the last fifteen years; and it, like all the others, had been acquired by the sordid and devious methods of usury, mortgage and foreclosure. But it was an attractive spot. Young Jabez liked the place and all of his duties in it except the bookkeeping. But in spite of the

journals and ledgers he would have been content with his life at Windmill Creek, if that hypocritical, grasping, penny-pinching, blood-sucking uncle had left him and his people in peace.

IT was only two days after the purchase of the parrot. Young Bunting had ridden around the crops in the cool of the morning, then breakfasted on baked fish, baked yams and a fruit known locally and derisively as "overseers' butter." Now he sat in a cool, cellar-like room at the rear of the house.

The walls of the place were thick, the doors and windows narrow. The flagged floor was lower than the surface of the ground by several feet, and three stone steps led down from the threshold of the exterior door. That door and the windows stood wide open, letting in a faint breath of air and narrow shafts of sunlight strained through the pale and deeper greens of drooping banana leaves and hanging vines.

Jabez, perched on a high stool at a high desk, with elbows planted upon an open ledger, gazed at the tempered sunshine at the open door and thought of the bursting and frothing of white surf on lilac sand in the near-by cove called Cattle-wash. The parrot waddled to and fro along the top of the desk, toeing-in grotesquely, and halting every now and then to cock an inquiring eye at Jabez, for whom it felt a keen affection already.

It evidently felt that the young man understood and appreciated it as nobody had since its first owner, Lugless Barnes—named so because his ears had been cut off—had taught it the mysteries of human speech. Now it wanted another ride around the crops on the young man's shoulder.

Booted feet sounded outside, a shad-

ow fell in the doorway and down the three steps and into the peaceful room came Mr. Amos Bunting. His long, clean-shaved face was at once dark and pale with some violent emotion. He flourished a riding-cane in his hand.

"What's this I hear?" he screamed. "Ye graceless loon! Ye've let Parker an' his godless wenches into me house at Cattle-wash—an' rent free! An' ye've been feedin' them there these past three weeks out o' my pocket! Deny it if ye can!"

"I'll not deny it," replied young Jabez. "'Tis but a ruin of a house, and this is the house they should be in if there was any justice in the law—as you know better than I do! I have hidden them there, and have fed them as well as I could—and why not, in God's name? Ye tricked and robbed John Parker of this grand estate. Don't flourish that stick at me, Amos Bunting—for I warn ye I've stood all I can—and if you make a move against my friends again, or so much as misname them again, I'll—"

"Ay, ye'll do wonders," jeered Amos. "Now harky to me!"

But at that moment the parrot burst into speech from the top of the desk, with its head thrust forward and a red eye blazing upon Amos Bunting.

"Belay that, ye damned, yellow-bellied, purse-cuttin' son of a gallows bird!" screamed the parrot.

Uncle Amos's long face purpled with congested rage and blood.

"Strangle him!" he cried. "Kill him! Wring his neck!"

"Not I—nor you," said Jabez, in a dangerous voice. "Ye've heard the truth of yerself at last."

Amos lunged and grasped the bird in his cruel hands; and then all of the young man's hatred of that merciless usurer and his pitiless, slimy ways took

fire like dry gun-powder. He had struck the blow before he realized that he had moved. He had struck with the great brass-bound ledger—had swung it with both hands and all his strength. He saw his uncle fall like a log and roll over.

He stared at the long face, which was now as gray as old sailcloth, and at a trickle of dark blood from a corner of the thin, cruel mouth. Then he dropped the ledger, snatched up his hat and fled precipitately, closing the door behind him.

JABEZ fled through sappy green ranks of bananas and a strip of breast-high canes and into a sloping wood. He emerged from the wood onto the sandy shore. Something struck heavily on his left shoulder, and clung there. It was only the parrot. He laughed hysterically, and the parrot swore.

Launching his boat, he pulled clear of the gentle surf and then set a little sail. He must warn his unfortunate friends, the Parkers, and then go into hiding himself, no matter whether Amos Bunting was dead or only stunned. If dead, Jabez would be a fugitive from the law; but if Amos were only stunned, the youth's case would be even more desperate. Alive, Amos would be his relentless enemy and far more dangerous than the blundering machinery of the law; for with Jabez out of the way, Amos would be the senior partner's heir; and Jabez believed that the hiring of assassins was not beyond Amos Bunting's criminal possibilities.

Jabez imagined himself in his uncle's place and character. He saw that now was the logical time for the career of young Jabez to come to a mysterious end. He could even construct the

pious letter of intelligence Amos would send to his brother Andrew :

"The poor lad, whom I loved like a son, fell into godless company despite all my efforts to keep his feet in the straight way. It may be that I was too easy with him—and if so, the Lord has chastened me for my sin. Our poor dear lad made an unprovoked attack upon me—I had done no more than warn him against a certain graceless and bankrupt family of his acquaintance—struck me down and fled, leaving me unconscious; and though I have made every effort to find him, I have neither seen nor heard of him since."

Young Jabez may be forgiven the half hope that the blow with the brass-bound ledger had proved fatal.

He realized that, with empty pockets, his chances of escaping either the law or his uncle's agent's of destruction were slight indeed. Amos owed him forty guineas. There was not so much as a Spanish dollar at Windmill Creek. But there was always money hidden somewhere in the usurer's wretched house near the water front of Kingston; and he saw that his first move toward self-preservation was to collect that just debt before Amos or the law could stop him.

Jabez made a speedy coasting around and into the harbor of Kingston. He beached his boat among other small craft and made the last leg of his journey by obscure ways, among warehouses and ship-chandlers' stores and sailors' grog shops. The parrot maintained its perch on his left shoulder.

He approached his uncle's establishment from the rear, through narrow, blind alleys and over a wall or two. He arrived just as a ragged fellow of seafaring appearance tossed a line up to and around the rail of the wooden gallery which overhung the narrow

back yard. The robber turned, then fled without a second glance, leaving the rope dangling. Jabez went up the rope and withdrew it after him.

Jabez searched high and low for his forty guineas. He knew that there was plenty of gold and silver hidden somewhere on the premises, for it was three weeks and more since Amos had made a shipment of money to Boston, in the armed brig *Fidelity*. But where the devil was it? Jabez searched in the more unlikely places first, tapping walls and floors; next, he went through all unlocked drawers, boxes, cupboards. Minutes ran into hours.

The parrot was the first to lose interest in the game. It grew sleepy. It flapped to the top of a wardrobe and slept.

At last, young Jabez forced the locks of the strong-box under his uncle's bed; and upon finding nothing there to his purpose, he gave up in despair. Panic possessed him. He left the house by the scullery door and stole away.

HE had not gone far when he was suddenly confronted by an acquaintance at a turn in a narrow lane. He would have slipped past, with averted face, had not the other bawled his name and laid hands upon him.

"Well met, Jabez Buntin'! An' don't hang yer head, lad! Jabez in Dolly Dimple Street be more to my taste nor Amos in his countin' house with his ledger and his Bible. But now ye must come aboard, for this be my birthday. Victuals an' drink o' the best."

This Captain Wendall was master and part owner of the Virginian brig *Amaryllis*, and one accustomed to having things his own good-natured way afloat and ashore, sober and drunk. Just now he was neither drunk nor sober, but "a sheet in the wind."

After the first shock of embarrassment, Jabez felt a warmth and lift of the heart. He liked this Virginian, and his high-handed and open-handed ways. He would go aboard the brig and eat and drink as if he had not a care in the world. Why not?

And what next? A sudden hope sprang in his young heart. If he were to tell all, would not this daring Virginian save him? The Amaryllis had her freight aboard and was ready to sail at her master's pleasure. But in that case, what of his helpless friends at Cattle-wash?—what would become of poor John Parker and his daughters, if Jabez sailed away without warning them, and Amos survived the stroke of the brass-bound ledger?

No, he could not leave the island without first communicating with that despoiled family. He would make a clean breast of everything to Captain Wendall, and throw the Parkers as well as himself upon the Virginian's mercy. But not now. Later would do. It would come easier and sound better over the punch bowl in the brig's cabin.

So Jabez Bunting and Captain Wendall went aboard the green brig half an hour before sunset. Wendall was in high spirits. He mixed the punch with his own hands—an extra special punch of his own invention. The rum that went into it was the golden liquor of Mount Gay, in Barbados. He diluted it from a jar of porous clay that had hung all day in the draft of the open skylight, cooling its contents by evaporation. He measured sugar into it and stirred it with a silver ladle.

"The liquor this spoon has stirred about would load this brig to the rails," he boasted.

He sliced four limes, and two very ripe mangos into it and scattered a pinch of nutmeg on the surface.

As young Jabez sipped his first glass he remembered the parrot and wondered where and when he had last seen it. But he forgot the bird as he sipped his second glass.

WHEN Amos Bunting recovered consciousness, and found himself flat on his back in the rear room of his plantation house at Windmill Creek, it took him several minutes to recall to his aching brain the events which had brought him there and into that position. Then he sat up, but only to lie down again. His discovered dry blood at a corner of his mouth. His tongue was swollen and very painful, for he had bitten it deeply with his sharp eyeteeth.

He lay perfectly still and gave himself to thought, realizing that he was in no condition for immediate action. And there was no need of immediate action. There was plenty of time. Jabez, his nephew and his brother's heir, had defied him, threatened him, struck him down and fled. This was a pleasant thought; for he saw in a flash, despite the pain in his head, how greatly the young man's violent act had simplified a certain important matter. He had been waiting long for the lad to be goaded into doing something of the kind and so achieving his own undoing.

Jabez had gone into hiding, by his own act and of his own free will—and from that guilty retirement he would never reappear. Red Jerry would see to that. A word to the sailor, and the thing was as good as done. It would cost money, of course—Red Jerry's price was not too low—but it would be money well invested.

Young Jabez had fled to the hills, of course, for he had no money with which to escape by sea—but he was

fool enough to consider the jungle the safer hiding-place, in any case. There he would hide and consort with run-away slaves and servants and deserters from ships and garrisons, a terrified outcast from orderly and law-protected society; and there Red Jerry would find him in the course of a few days, or of a few weeks at most.

Amos smiled. It would be a blow to the self-righteous pride of the godly merchant of Boston—but not an entirely unexpected blow, for Amos had shrewdly hinted at indications of insubordination and levity in his beloved nephew's character, in recent communications.

Amos fingered the tender bump on his head and wondered what had hit him. He sat up, very carefully this time, and looked around. He saw the big, brass-bound ledger on the floor.

"That's it," he murmured. "'Twould have been better for him if he'd used an ax—and murdered me outright."

He was in no condition to mount and ride until several hours after nightfall; and even then he rode slowly, with strong fellows at his stirrups and another at his mule's head. He drew rein occasionally and sipped brandy from a flask, and renewed the moisture of the bandage on his crown from an earthenware jar carried by one of his escort. He felt better, but still far from well. The wavering buzz within his skull persisted, now faint, now strong, now low and blunt like the bursting of surf on sand, and again as high and thin as the horn of a mosquito. At the back of the town he drew rein and considered a question. Should he send a message to Red Jerry now or wait until morning? He decided to wait until morning—until his head was quite clear. There was no particular hurry.

He was within twenty yards of his own door when he met and was recognized by the harbor master, Frink.

"Have ye met with an accident, Master Bunting?" asked Frink.

"Not so, captain—but I wish from the core of my poor heart that I might truthfully name it an accident," replied Amos, in his most pious voice. "I would to God, in His mercy, that I might believe it was an accident. But ye'll hear of it all too soon, my friend. And now I must wish ye good night."

He moved on, and dismounted at his own door. He produced a key, unlocked the door, then dismissed the mule and the escort. He did not see that the harbor master, who had turned after him unobserved, now stood in the black shadow of the house opposite.

Amos entered and closed and locked the door behind him. His tinder-box was in his bedroom. He would go right up and to bed. If he should feel steadier after an hour's rest he might get into touch with Red Jerry before dawn.

So he ascended the steep and narrow staircase in the dark. He halted at the top and extended a hand, feeling for the door of his bedroom, which he had left shut. He was sure that he had left it shut—but now it was wide open.

He heard strange sounds from the pitch blackness before him—clucking and dry clicking sounds and a queer rustling as of dead leaves or very stiff feathers. These sounded from above the level of his head, in the direction of the wardrobe between the windows. They did not suggest a human origin. Rats? The house was overrun with the varmints. He must poison them. He would purchase poison in the morning, after his business with Red Jerry. Young Jabez first, then the rats.

"Scat!" he cried, and stamped a foot.

"Kill him!" screamed a devilish voice. "Wring his neck!"

And something swished in the air and struck him heavily in the face. He staggered back and pitched, head first, down the steep and narrow stairs. His scream of horror was shrill and brief.

CAPTAIN WENDALL and his guests still sat at table in the cabin of the *Amaryllis*, under the open skylight and a hanging lantern. The other guests were officers of the garrison, a major and a lieutenant, who had come aboard within a half hour of young Jabez Bunting. The dishes had been removed and the punch bowl replenished.

Jabez had eaten little, but drunk much. No opportunity had been given him to tell Wendall of his desperate situation. There he sat like a fool, helpless, while every passing minute brought disaster nearer, whether Amos Bunting were dead or alive. He thought of himself as a rat in a trap helplessly awaiting the arrival of the inevitable instrument of destruction. He tried to drown that thought in punch.

They were still at table when the harbor master entered the cabin. Captain Frink was cordially received by Wendall and the military gentlemen, and a glass was filled for him.

"One moment, my friends," said the harbor master. "Duty first, no matter how unpleasant. Bunting, I have news for you. A boatman told me that he saw you come aboard with the skipper here. Your Uncle Amos is dead, my boy."

Jabez stared, but said nothing. His heart was numb.

"Of a broken neck," continued Captain Frink. "Chucked downstairs, in his own house—and dead as a leg of mutton."

"Downstairs?" repeated Jabez in a thick voice. "What stairs?"

"The front stairs. I was there, in the street, at the very door, and heard it all. I smashed in the door, with help—and there he lay, with a broken neck. We searched the house. Too late! Nobody there. Nothing there but a parrot. But a strong-box in the bedroom had been ripped open."

"A parrot?" Jabez pressed a hand to his brow. "I saw Uncle Amos this morning, at Windmill Creek. That's where I left him." He got to his feet unsteadily. "Reckon I'd better go ashore," he said in a dazed voice. "Look things over. Lock 'em up. An' what about that parrot? I'd like to see that bird."

"We'll all go," volunteered Captain Wendall; and he nudged the harbor master and whispered, "The lad's had a trifle too much—not used to it—thinking about parrots, with a fortune just fallen into his lap. Parrots! Ducks an' drakes is what he'll play with the firm of A. & A. Bunting."

"And more power to him!" exclaimed the harbor master.

And so it was that Red Jerry never even suspected that his peculiar services had been required; and that a messenger on a fast pony carried word to the fugitives at Cattle-wash that their old home was again theirs; and that young Jabez Bunting sang in his little boat, sailing homeward at sunrise with the parrot on his shoulder. And the cream of the jest was that Red Jerry had been the fellow who had sold Jabez the parrot for a silver dollar.

THE END.

DO YOU READ DETECTIVE FICTION ?

Trigger Muscle

A True Story

By Howard McLellan



Madden crept stealthily up
in back of Tanner Smith

*From the Vicious Thievery of New York's
Gang O'ney Madden Rose to Rulership*

ON a fall evening in 1925 a racy, low-swung sedan, labeled with Illinois license plates, was crowded into the curb by a snorting yellow sportster. Half a block ahead lay the northern boundary line of New York City.

Five men piled out of the Illinois car. One was stouter than his companions. His cheeks were chubby cushions of glossy flesh, and a huge eleven and a half carat diamond glinted from his soft, fat hand.

"Whadda yuh guys mean, cutting into me this way?" he spouted at the occupants of the yellow sportster.

"You are not in Chicago now, Capone," the man at the wheel responded. "The big town ahead is closed to you."

Capone bristled. "Who says so?"

"Mr. O'ney the Killer says so," the other sneered.

Who is this O'ney Madden who kept Capone out of New York? Read this amazing true story of the rise of a gangster next week!

Read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—10c



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



ASKS for a Voodoo story (and we'll bet he never read one like Theodore Roscoe's "The Voodoo Express," coming soon):

Bronx, N. Y.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for over ten years and after reading demands, in the "Argonotes," for stories which were later published, I take heart and hereby set down my demand with scant hope of success.

I am interested in Voodooism, and as such literature is hard to get, I could think of no better answer to a prayer than to see a six-part serial in a future issue of your magazine.

F. G.

ONE hundred per cent:

Asheville, N. C.

In 1905 a neighbor of our family gave me—a boy of twelve—a bundle of magazines. In the bunch were quite a few copies of the ARGOSY. I don't know the dates of these copies, but I think I can find some of them in the attic and am going to try to do so. I was not in position to get the ARGOSY regularly until I was seventeen, but since that time I don't think I have missed more than a dozen copies. It is by long odds my favorite magazine out of some dozen or more that I read regularly. There are some few authors for whose works I do not especially care, but I read them all. My favorites are the *Semi Dual*, *Peter the Brazen*, "Jan of the Jungle" and *Jimmie Cordie* stories. The ARGOSY is one hundred per cent O. K.

A. C. PRINCE.

MAJOR BRANE and "The Devil's Due" get a cheer:

I like ARGOSY because it tends to do away with unreality more than any magazine I have read, and probably because the heroes are more like human beings than some invincible person. This belief is sometimes repulsed, especially when I read *Peter the Brazen* and Western stories. The only stories I have read that I feel I can recommend to all my friends are "The Man with the Pinpoint Eyes," all of *Gillian Hazeltine*

stories, "The Devil's Due," "Bentfinger," "Captain Judas," and "The Pirate of Wall Street."

I think that the ARGOSY holds a great deal of interest to persons who appreciate good fiction.

Something in the story "The Devil's Due" leads me to think there is a sequel to it. I hope there is.

ANDY MANOS.

"PIRATE of Wall Street" and "Bentfinger" rank high:

Milwaukee, Wis.

Am sending ten coupons for my ARGOSY drawing.

Have just finished reading "The Pirate of Wall Street," by Fred MacIsaac, and it certainly was great, and that goes for "Bentfinger," by Theodore Roscoe. Am glad to hear that A. Merritt is writing another story for ARGOSY and that we will soon hear from C. A. Seltzer and *John Solomon*, by H. Bedford-Jones.

EARL J. W. FORSTER.

GLAD to see Garret Smith back:

Haverhill, Mass.

I think the stories have been good in the ARGOSY lately except that there have been too many gangster stories. "Jan of the Jungle" was good. I like all Foreign Legion stories. "Captain Judas" was good, but not nearly as good as "Captain Nemesis."

I am glad to see Garret Smith back. Would also like to see Seltzer, Burroughs, Coe, and Will McMorrow. I think Mr. McMorrow wrote dandy war stories. I would like to see some stories about Annapolis or West Point.

GEORGE THOMPSON, JR.

MORE adventure "without women"!

Martin's Ferry, Ohio.

Why do you print misleading statements in your Looking Ahead? In your issue for June 10 you stated that "Under the Polar Ice" is a modern Jules Verne novel, but Jules Verne never had any women in his stories (that is, any I have read—"Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," "Around the World in Eighty Days,"

and "The Mysterious Island"). Jules was a great writer and love was never the underlying idea. Give us more adventure stories without women.

ROBERT ATTE.

MOVED to write a pæan of praise:

Minneapolis, Minn.

I'm not a poet and have no desires of being one; therefore, it is obvious that no ordinary influence could be responsible for any poem that might issue from my pen. Save your brickbats for some one who writes such things on purpose; mine popped up by itself, unassisted.

FRIEND ARGOSY

A boon companion for eight years
That's filled with joy and thrills for me;
It holds me fast from page to page;
It is the grand old ARGOSY.

MacIsaac, Worts and Bedford-Jones—
These are my favorite authors three.
Seltzer, Johnson, Grinstead, Tuttle
Do put the West in ARGOSY.

The South Sea tales are all well Dunn,
With Ralph Perry to Horn in, too;
Yes, *Cordie* yarns are all Wirt while,
They're stuffed with action all way through.

Farley, Cummings, Merritt, and Kline
Serve us much scientific lore,
While Lawrence, Mason, McGrew, all
Do teach us history galore.

Mundy sometimes comes on Wednesday,
Bringing with him Quorn and Rancee;
In ARGOSY there is a Friend
Who writes of West and history.

Ted Roscoe knows his Legionnaires,
And Gardner his whispering tales;
But when it comes to thrills galore,
Peter the Brazen never fails.

Long life to grand old ARGOSY,
An ever steady lifelong friend
Who never yet has failed to please,
A pleasure that is without end.

LEVERN E. LARSON.

THIS reader wants more of Dunn's gangster stories (and we'll break down and admit they're to be found in ARGOSY and DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY):

Kilgore, Texas.

Congratulations! ARGOSY is supreme! I've read nearly every magazine on the stands and, I believe, I can truthfully say that ARGOSY is the best magazine out.

Tell J. Allan Dunn to write some more gangster stories. Also have Loring Brent put out some more stories about *Peter the Brazen*. I think John H. Thompson does fine with *Bill and Jim*.

Here are my only complaints: Have a few Chinks to put *Jimmie Cordie* and Co. on the spot. As an author, I think J. E. Grinstead would make a good-soup cooler. In closing, I would like to put in a request for some fighting stories like "The Torero Pug," by Phil Richards.

LOUIS MCCALL.

WANTS another "Jan of the Jungle":

Oil City, Pa.

I enjoyed "Jan of the Jungle" and hope you will print another story similar to it in the future. My favorite authors are Loring Brent and Fred MacIsaac. Erle Stanley Gardner writes excellent "Whispering Tales."

ROBERT E. SCHETTLER.

FROM father to son, ARGOSY goes marching on—as it has for almost fifty years:

What Cheer, Iowa.

I most certainly don't agree with people who seem to take pleasure in knocking the ARGOSY. My dad has been reading the ARGOSY for over twenty-five years, and during my sixteen years, I have never heard any kind of a kick coming from him. He has read it when it was in the form of the *Cavalier*, and so on up to the present date. The ARGOSY is one magazine that we don't drop at the end of a few months. We would rather have it than a dozen of the others any old time. I am sure that the ARGOSY will remain in this family for some time to come. Dad says that he can get as much enjoyment from the ARGOSY as to go to a show.

I really believe that it deserves more praise than it actually gets. I sure hate to have the Western story writers knocked on—they are usually my favorites. "The Devil's Checkerboard," is a swell story—I hate to see it end. Give J. E. Grinstead a pat on the back. *Joe Dent* in this story is wonderfully portrayed. I also like Ray Cummings's "Tama, Princess of Mercury" and his other futuristic stories.

I have been reading the ARGOSY since I could read a story and understand what it meant.

Bring on the Westerns and some more *Peter the Brazen*, by Loring Brent. I'm no knocker of the ARGOSY and those who make it up; and that's that.

SUNSHINE CHRISMAN.

Montgomery, Ala.

Whoopee! ARGOSY is getting better every issue, and I have been reading it several years (dad's been reading it over fifteen years). Thanks a lot

for having so many *Bill* and *Jim* stories lately. Say, is John H. any kin to John A. Thompson, both writers for ARGOSY?

By the way, what does ARGOSY mean? Also, how many names has it had?

I am no kicker (I think they ought to be kicked), but ask you in the name of all Dixie to have a story about the "War for Southern Independence" (our viewpoint). An author in Montgomery during the Confederate veterans' reunion here June 2-6, could have got some fine stories from the old boys.

EVERETTE H. MADDOX.

SATISFIED for five years:

Glendale, Ariz.

I am taking the opportunity to praise your magazine. Dad and I have been reading it for better than five years and we are very well satisfied. My favorite characters are *Peter the Brazen*, *Gillian Hazeltine*, and *Bill and Jim*. Erle Stanley Gardner's "Whispering Tales" are swell; let's have more of them. I do not especially like your impossible stories, though "The Hot-house World" was interesting. Theodore Roscoe surprised me with his "Bentfinger." It was real good.

PAUL HUNTER.

YES, we were pioneers in science-fiction:

New Kensington, Pa.

I buy your magazine chiefly for the science-fiction stories it contains. Just recently I read a science-fiction story that appeared in ARGOSY in 1899—"A Princess of Atlantis." A friend of mine who is also a science-fiction fan was kind enough to lend it to me. So ARGOSY must be pretty old in fathering this type of story. Please get Mr. Merritt, to hurry up; his stories are always A-1.

Your other stories are very good, too, especially "Bentfinger." Roscoe has what so many authors lack: versatility. Words is another.

H. E. BILBIE.

ONE man's meat is another's literary indigestion:

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Is.

I have been reading ARGOSY for three years now and I surely enjoy it. I can't understand why so many kickers pick out the best stories to throw bricks at. The only stories I ever disliked in ARGOSY were *Bellow Bill Williams* and circus stories.

"Captain Judas," "The Tiger of Pnom Kha," "Jan of the Jungle," "The Prince of Peril" and "Bentfinger" were the best stories I have ever read. I have just finished "Bentfinger," and it

beats all of Roscoe's other works. More power to you, Mr. Roscoe!

Please give us more impossible stories and sea stories.

My favorite authors are Otis Adelbert Kline, Theodore Roscoe, and F. V. W. Mason.

Can't we have some more of *John Solomon's* adventures?

W. W. TAYLOR.

ANOTHER Foreign Legion fan:

Philadelphia, Pa.

The *Gillian Hazeltine* stories are great. Theodore Roscoe and Robert Carse are to be congratulated with the splendid Foreign Legion stories which they turn out. The Bildad Road stories are surely great, only there are not enough of them. I dislike the stranger than fiction stories like "Tama, Princess of Mercury," which goes against my grain. However, this is my only dislike and it cannot be helped, as there are others who do like them.

THOMAS E. DAVIS.

VINCENT CONNOR ranks as one of this reader's favorite characters:

Plainfield, N. J.

Except for *Bill* and *Jim* your magazine has any variety one could wish for and like; and, as I notice by reading the opinion of your readers that quite a few like them, I'll make no kick. I like especially your Foreign Legion stories by Carse. I am now reading "Out of Yesteday," by that author, and can hardly wait for the next copy.

I like also the short stories about *Vincent Connor's* adventures by H. Bedford-Jones. All fantastic stories attract me. Give us more historical novels.

WM. ROSKEY.

AN adventurer who likes our adventure tales:

Borger, Texas.

Tell Loring Brent to keep up the good work. Having knocked around the world a lot and seven years in the U. S. Navy, I naturally like adventure stories the best, especially stories of the Foreign Legion. Just keep ARGOSY as it is.

JAMES RAY.

AN enthusiast with a library of ARGOSY novels:

New York, N. Y.

I have bound thirty-eight ARGOSY novels already and am still doing it. "The Snake Mother," "The Pirate of Wall Street," "Under the Polar

Ice," "Vampire," "Bentfinger," "Captain Judas," and "Chinese for Racket" were good, too. "Speed-Storm," by Barré Lyndon, was great! Let's have a serial by him. "Devil's Checkboard" and "Tama, Princess of Mercury," are coming along fine.

PETER KOZACK.

LIKES to share reading enjoyment with others who haven't yet met ARGOSY:

Struthers, Ohio.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for three years and I have not found another magazine that can compare with it. I read every story that is in the magazine every week.

Have been the source of some friends reading ARGOSY.

I like historical, impossible and the *Bill* and *Jim* stories best, but my favorite stories are of the French Foreign Legion.

Can't say I liked "The Snake Mother," by Merritt. *Peter the Brazen* and *Gillian Hazeltine* are also great characters brought to life by great authors.

As long as the Foreign Legion marches I'll be an ARGOSY reader, and the Legion will march forever.

VERN WILLIAMS.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get an ARGOSY drawing (not the cover painting) for framing.

This coupon not good after November 21.

8-29



Looking Ahead!

WHALING BLOOD

SHANGHAIED aboard the hardest of the square-rigged whalers, with a bucko captain and a treacherous mate planning to kill or maroon him, a young landsman fights single-handed for his heritage.

By DON WATERS

DEATH ANGEL

It started with a duel in Paris—and ended in a way no man could guess, on the firing line of invaded France.

By THEODORE ROSCOE

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF SEPTEMBER 5th

Society Girl Wants A New Name

through the greater part of it and are about to enter upon a more or less "prolonged period of quiescence, preparatory to a recovery."
"The causes of the depression are universal character, namely,



Give This Girl a Name

This popular and beautiful society girl has been chosen to sponsor a line of nationally sold Beauty Preparations. Because of her social position she must use another name. Suggest a winning name for her—a first and last name—and win a cash prize. Just some simple name that is easy to say and easy to remember.

JUST SENDING A NAME QUALIFIES YOU FOR OPPORTUNITY TO

Win \$2,600.⁰⁰ or Buick 8 Sedan and \$1,100.⁰⁰ for Promptness

This huge prize is *Extra* and in addition to the cash prize for the Society Girl's name. No wonder we say that here is your opportunity to win a fortune. Think of it! \$2,600.00 all cash or a big Buick 8 cylinder Sedan and \$1,100.00 in cash besides—all coming to you at once! Many work a lifetime without ever getting together such a magnificent sum. Hundreds of prizes—over \$4,300.00 in cash will be given in this huge prize distribution. Some yet unknown person is going to win a fortune—why not you? You have just as good a chance as anyone. *Every single person who takes an active part will be rewarded in cash.* Just send a name suggestion to qualify for this opportunity of a lifetime—nothing more to do to qualify. But act at once—remember \$1,100.00 Extra is given for promptness.

SEND NO MONEY You don't have to send any money, you don't have to buy anything or sell anything to win the Name Prize. Just send the first name you think of—it may be a winner—it has just as good a chance as any. But do it NOW! Rush letter with name suggestion or send coupon at once. I will answer at once giving you all the details and telling you just how you stand in the distribution of \$4,300.00 cash prizes. Here may be the means of making you financially independent for life.

TED ADAMS, Manager

906 Sycamore St. Dept. 915-H Cincinnati, Ohio

Social Position Demands Change In Name As
Popular Beauty's Photo Appears In
National Advertising

CINCINNATI, Ohio (Tuesday)—Few people dodge fame, yet that is the wish of a local debutante whose photo has recently is to be featured in national magazines throughout America. A large cash prize is to be given the person suggesting the name which will be featured with the photograph

We Will Pay
\$250.00
Just for a Girl's Name

COSTS NOTHING TO WIN

Nothing to Buy—Nothing to Sell—No Puzzles, "Lucky Numbers" or "Guessing Contests" to Win This Cash Prize

JUST SUGGEST A GIRL'S NAME

Here's an amazing opportunity to win a big cash prize for just a moments time. Simply send us a name for this beautiful society girl—a name that you think would sound nice in a Magazine advertisement. We have chosen this society girl to sponsor a new line of Beauty Preparations. Her picture will appear in our advertisements. But because of her social position she cannot use her real name. We are going to pay a big cash prize just for a winning name. Think of a name—send it to us TODAY—Win \$250.00 cash and qualify for an opportunity to win further prizes of \$2,600.00 or Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and \$1,100.00 Cash for promptness in the simple way we show you. See rules below.

YOU CAN'T LOSE

Nothing to lose—costs nothing to win. It is easy to think of a name. Some name that may flash into your mind this very instant may win the prize. Just some simple name like Helen Miller or Mary Lee may be chosen as the prize winner. Don't let this opportunity slip through your fingers. Think of a name NOW—send it TODAY.

NAMING CONTEST RULES

Contest open to everyone except employees of our company. Only one name may be submitted. Sending more than one name will cause all names sent by you to be thrown out. Prize of \$250.00 will be awarded to one name of all those submitted. In case of duplicate winning names, duplicate prizes will be given. Contest closes October 15, 1931. Every person sending name qualifies for opportunity to win \$2,600.00 or Buick 8 Sedan and \$1,100.00 cash for promptness. Use the coupon or write letter for all details.

C O U P O N

TED ADAMS, Manager
906 Sycamore St., Dept. 915-H, Cincinnati, Ohio

My suggestion for the Society Girl's Name is:

My Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

I am interested in winning \$2,600.00. Rush me all information and tell me how I stand.

Win a Studebaker or \$3,000.00 in Cash

SOMEONE who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a latest model 8 cylinder Studebaker President Sedan or its full value in cash (\$2,000.00). In addition to the Studebaker Sedan we are also giving away six Ford Sedans, a General Electric Refrigerator, a Shetland Pony, an Eastman Moving Picture Outfit, Leather Goods, Silverware, Jewelry and many other valuable gifts—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash. Already we have given away more than \$150,000.00 in cash and valuable merchandise to advertise our business. A. H. Jones received \$3,050.00, John Burroughs \$3,795.00, Mrs. M. Iverson \$2,320.00, W. R. Eddington \$3,050.00, Mrs. Kate L. Needham \$3,150.00 and E. J. Cullen \$2,220.00. This offer is open to anyone living in the United States, outside of Chicago, and is guaranteed by an old reliable company of many years standing.

**Solve
This
Puzzle**

▽ ▽

**Qualify
For
This
Opportunity**



**Solve
This
Puzzle**

▽ ▽

**Qualify
For
This
Opportunity**

Find 5 Faces

There are a number of Policemen hidden in the trees and bushes in the picture above ready to pounce upon the burglar. Only their caps and faces are visible. See if you can find them. When you find 5, draw a circle around each one or mark each one with an X, then fill in your name and address on the coupon below and send it to me right away.

\$1,000.00 Cash Given for Promptness

If you act quickly and win the Studebaker Sedan I will also give you \$1,000.00 in cash just for being prompt—making a total of \$3,000.00 you may win. Altogether there are a total of \$7,500.00 worth of prizes to be given and the money to pay the prizes is now on deposit at one of Chicago's largest banks ready to be paid to the prize winners. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be paid each one tying, and any winner may have cash instead of the prize won, if so preferred. Get busy right away. Solve the puzzle, fill in the coupon below and send it to me just as soon as possible to qualify for an opportunity to share in the \$7,500.00 worth of prizes. **EVERYBODY PROFITS.** Who knows but that you may be the Lucky First Prize Winner? It pays to act promptly.

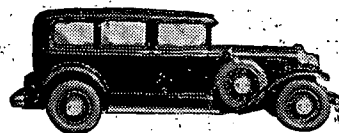
**James Armstrong, Mgr., Dept. P-574
323 S. Peoria St., Chicago, Ill.**

I have solved the puzzle and am anxious to receive a prize.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....



Mail Today